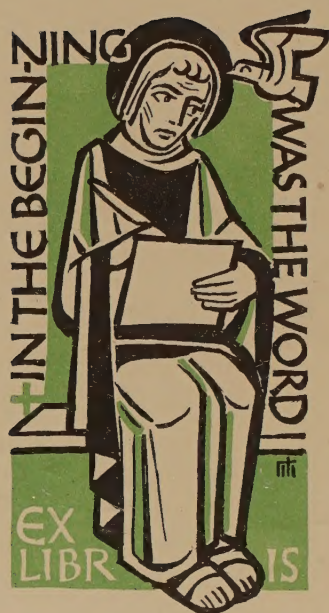




Michael G. Mayer

Festival and Fast

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By the
Rev. G. D. Rosenthal



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I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

TO THE GLORIOUS MEMORY OF S. AGATHA,
VIRGIN AND MARTYR,

WHO, AFTER ENDURING IMPRISONMENT AND TORTURE,
WAS BURNT ALIVE IN THE MARKET-PLACE OF
CATANIA ON FEBRUARY 5TH, A.D. 251,

FEARLESSLY WITNESSING TO JESUS

PREFACE

THE cycle of the Liturgical Year, with its ordered sequence of Fast and Festival, is one of the richest treasures of the Church. The addresses here collected are an attempt to show what a valuable method it provides for a regular course of instruction on Catholic Faith and Practice. They have been delivered either in the course of my ordinary ministry as a parish priest or in answer to special calls ; a few of them more than once, and in different places. Some of them have already appeared in the *Church Times*, and are now reprinted by the courtesy of the Editor, but the majority are published for the first time. They make no claim to originality, except, perhaps, in method and treatment ; indeed, my debt to representative teachers both Anglican and Roman is so wide that it would be pedantic to attempt to make more than a general acknowledgment of it. But I have had many assurances that the addresses have proved useful, and requests from many quarters that I would publish them in a connected form.

I have included an address on S. Agatha, and have dedicated the volume to her memory, not because her Feast can claim a place among the more important commemorations of the Church's Year, but

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because the story of her heroic witness is so little known among English Catholics, and as an expression, however unworthy, of the homage and devotion which I owe to her, as the Patron of my church.

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A HIGHWAY FOR THE KING

‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’

S. JOHN i. 23

I

AMONG the long-forgotten beauties of the countryside which the motor-car has re-discovered for us, is the approach to many an old English town. Take Warwick as an example. If you go to Warwick by train it hides its glories from you, showing you, as you draw near to it, nothing but the sombre walls of its gaol, memorable to Catholics by reason of the imprisonment of Father Enraght. But travel there by road, and the historic old town turns its beautiful face full on you with a smile of welcome. From Chadwick End, the Warwick road winds through magnificent woods, like a silver thread running through a dark green tapestry. Then it begins a steady rise, until some three miles from the town it reaches its highest point, and Warwick, with its quaint old buildings, lies spread out in the valley below you, its head proudly crowned with the lofty spire of S. Mary's. From that moment your thoughts are in the city you are approaching, in the history it enshrines, and in the objects of interest that await you there.

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Here is a picture of the way in which the Church approaches her Festivals, the lesser Feasts by their Eves, and the two greatest commemorations of the Liturgical Year, Christmas and Easter, by several weeks of preparation, in order that by thinking about them beforehand we may make better use of them when we reach them. Advent is the season of preparation for Christmas ; its Sundays are milestones on the road which leads to Bethlehem. Before we enter that little town, and seek the stable which is the throbbing heart of human history, to kneel with the shepherds at the Manger-Throne of Christ, the Church bids us pause for a while on the highway, and prepare ourselves by repentance, that we may worship and welcome him aright.

This explains the prominent place which S. John the Baptist occupies in the Advent Gospels and Lessons as the herald and forerunner of the Saviour. In that sublime, austere figure the longings of the centuries for a Divine Deliverer culminate and are personified. It was the great work of the Baptist to tell men that Christ was at hand, to call them to repentance, to make them stop a moment in their careless, worldly lives and take thought for their souls, so that, when the Lord should come among them, they would be ready to recognise and receive him. So he repeated to them the burning words of the prophet Isaiah, 'Make straight the way of the Lord. Every valley must be filled, and every mountain and hill must be brought low, and the crooked must be made straight, and the rough

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places plain.' These words describe the progress of an Eastern monarch, before whom pioneers went, preparing the road, filling up the quagmires, and levelling the rough places. It was a practice necessary enough, no doubt, in ancient times, and there is a quaint Jewish legend that during the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness this work was done by the pillar of cloud and fire, which brought low the mountains and filled the valleys, that the people might pass over them in their journey. So, said the Baptist, must men prepare for the coming of Christ among them. So, reiterates the Church, must we prepare for his coming to us on Christmas Day. For when the Blessed Saviour desires to come to us in the most Holy Sacrament and take up his abode in our hearts, he finds exactly the same obstacles which opposed him during his earthly life ; the same hills and marshes, the same devious ways and stony paths. It is our business during Advent to throw down the hills and fill up the low places, and straighten and smooth the highway for the progress of the King of Kings. So only will Christmas be what it can be to us. So only will our souls be ready to appropriate the treasures of grace and love which are stored up for us in the Christmas Cradle of the Christ.

II

'Make straight the way of the Lord.' Here, then, is a simile which pictures for us in a very vivid way the purpose and meaning of the Advent season.

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We shall find it even more striking and suggestive if we pass on to examine it in detail.

‘Every mountain must be brought low.’ This is a figure easy enough to read, for what are these mountains but the deliberate, grievous sins which block Christ’s path to our hearts? If we look into ourselves, and honestly try to find out what it is that hinders our growth in spiritual life, we shall generally find some positive fault or habit of sin which opposes itself like a mountain to the influence of grace. There is, for instance, the mountain of pride. Men exalt themselves against God by all kinds of pride: the pride of intellect—they are too proud to surrender their own prejudices and bow to the authority of Christ; or the pride of self-satisfaction—they are too proud to seek God’s grace; or the pride of wealth and worldly position—they are too proud to become as little children, that they may enter into the Kingdom of God. Then there are the steep hills of our passions: the spirit of hatred and revenge, of unwillingness to forgive, of rancour and bitterness against our neighbours. So, too, luxury and sensuality, self-indulgence, greed of gain, forgetfulness of the needs of others; these are all obstacles blocking the Highway of the King. If we are not willing to remove them, we bar his path to our souls.

In any faithful examination of conscience it is not difficult to see the mountains and the hills, standing out sombre and threatening against the sky, and casting their dark shadow over the landscape of our

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lives. The Church bids us prepare for Christmas by levelling them to the ground. My mountain may seem too great for me ; it may stand like solid rock ; its foundations may be embedded deep in the inmost recesses of my soul. Yet I take courage when I remember the sure promise of Christ : ' Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say to this mountain, be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea ; and shall not doubt, but shall believe in his heart that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith.'

' And every valley must be filled.' The valleys may well represent our negative faults, sins of omission as they are called ; our slothfulness in the service of Christ and his Church, our refusal really to try to do better, our contentment with low ideals, our neglect of prayer and the sacraments. These negative sins often hinder the grace of God quite as much as positive faults, just as a room gets dusty not only when it is used, but when it is neglected. Moreover, they have this particular danger—that they do not trouble our consciences as much as positive sins. If we are guilty of some grave act of sin, we cannot help being aware of it ; it speaks at once to the conscience. But sins of omission do not trouble us in the same way ; we do not as a rule realise how much we are to blame for them.

Consider, for instance, how little sense of responsibility there is among us generally for the propagation of the Faith. The chief problem of the Church to-day

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is the problem of her unemployed—the majority, I am afraid, of most congregations—who are living on a weekly spiritual dole, and who appear to imagine they are fulfilling the obligation of church-membership by sitting down and enjoying the Faith, rather than by standing up for it and trying to spread it. That is why we do not make the progress we might in this great day of opportunity. To change the figure, we are carrying a dead weight of passengers, and the officers and crew have to spend most of their time in looking after the passengers when they are sea-sick, or in seeing that they don't fall overboard, or in hooking them back again when they do. We need to realise that we are voyaging heavenward not in a passenger-boat, but in a fishing smack, and that, if only everyone would lend a hand to the nets, we should soon enclose a great multitude of fishes. Here, then, is the second note in the Advent message of the Church. Every valley must be filled; filled with good intentions of devotion to Christ's cause, filled with zeal for the spread of his Kingdom, filled with eager, loving service to his Church, so that a level pathway may be made for him to enter into his Kingdom.

‘And the crooked must be made straight.’ Who can estimate the crooked ways of the soul? ‘All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way.’ Compromises with the world and its spirit, insincerity in social intercourse, habits of self-pity, self-deception, self-excuse, lack of honesty with conscience and with God; these

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are the crooked ways that impede our communion with Christ.

‘And the rough places plain.’ Here are the venial sins which are scattered along the road of our daily lives, the sins of weakness constantly repeated, which do not altogether prevent Christ from coming to us, but which, like rough, sharp flints on a road, make his way difficult and arduous. We know how much there is in us that is rough ; rough ways of speaking, rough judgments, rough looks, rough actions, that grate and irritate, and make us most unlike our Master. We regret them afterwards, but the roughness is still there, and breaks out again and again. How are we to smooth these rough places away, and thus prepare the way for Christ to come to us ? Only by having him with us already. That sounds paradoxical, but, like many paradoxes, it is the simple truth. He it is who must smooth the road to our hearts for himself. It is by having our eyes constantly fixed on him, by praying to him, by clinging close to him, by drawing ever nearer to him, that the rough places in our characters will be made plain. We can pray no better Advent prayer than this, that Christ should pass his smoothing hand over our rough lives, giving us grace to speak more kindly, to act more lovingly, to be more generous and sympathetic and forbearing, to be slower to take offence and quicker to make up quarrels. So we shall be making the path of Christ easier, not only to our own hearts, but to the hearts of other people too, for such things move men more

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strongly than any words of argument to embrace the Catholic religion. So we shall be preparing in the desert of this world a Highway for the King.

III

So the Advent Call comes to us as to the Jews in the days of old, Make straight the way of the Lord. Christ is coming at the last, at what day and hour we know not, in power and great glory to judge the quick and the dead. Christ is coming in Christmas Communion to take up his dwelling in our hearts. Let us make the way straight for his blessed Feet by prayer, by self-examination—above all, by seeking God's forgiveness through a good confession. To go to confession when we are not in a state of grace is not only an obligation of the Catholic life, but a great privilege and blessing as well. It applies to us as individuals the cleansing Blood of Jesus ; it gives us self-knowledge, one of the things that ' lead the soul to sovereign power ' ; it strengthens us against sin and temptation ; and it makes Holy Communion an entirely different experience, with a far more vivid sense of the Saviour's Presence, and a far deeper realisation of the peace that passeth understanding. When we confess our sins with a sincere resolution of amendment, then the mountains of our grievous sins are brought low, and the valleys of omission are filled up, and the crooked places of self-deception and self-excuse are made straight, and the rough places of our daily faults and failings are

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made plain, and the path is opened for the coming of Jesus to our souls.

With such an Advent preparation, the beautiful Feast of the birth of Christ will come to us in all the fullness of its glorious revelation. In the solemn stillness of the Midnight Mass—surely the crowning service of the whole Liturgical Year—we shall feel that Christ is indeed born again in the Bethlehem of our own spiritual experience. The song of the Angels in the midnight sky will wake an answering echo in our hearts. Our souls will be flooded with a joy compared with which all earthly pleasures are pale and fleeting phantoms of the night; and, with Christ dwelling in our hearts, we shall take away into our homes that divine gift of love which is the one enduring secret of happiness.

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS ?

‘What shall I do, then, with Jesus that is called
Christ ?’ S. MATTHEW xxvii. 22

I

IT was Pontius Pilate who asked this question, and we know how, to his undying shame, he answered it. ‘Pilate, when he had scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.’ But we may forget Pilate and think about ourselves, for, if he had to face and answer this question, so have we. It is an intensely personal question, which concerns every man and woman and child, and which concerns us separately and individually. We are saved corporately, it is true, as members of a great society which is called the Catholic Church, but that does not alter the fact that God deals with us as separate individuals. He has called each one of us into a personal relationship to himself, and it follows that we are compelled each one of us to face and to answer the question, ‘What shall *I* do with Jesus that is called Christ ?’

And if it is a personal question, it is also a very practical one. It is no mere matter of theological inquiry, or historical investigation, or philosophical speculation. All these things may enter into it,

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but they do not dispose of it. A man's belief about Christ may be so orthodox that he would pass for a first-class diploma in theology, and yet his answer to this question may be profoundly unsatisfactory. For the question is not, What do I think about Jesus, or what do I feel about him, or what do I say about him? but, What shall I *do* with him? and, therefore, it finds its answer not in our thoughts or words or emotions, but in the actions of our daily lives. We are answering it, indeed, every day we live: in our homes, in our companionships, in our work, in our amusements. It is so extraordinarily persistent; there is no possible way of getting rid of it. We may try to forget it in pleasure; we may hide it away beneath ledgers and cash-books; we may think we can avoid answering it by a mere formal profession of Christianity; we may put it away from us altogether, and say, 'What have I to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?' But this is a question which will not be silenced, which refuses to be shaken off, which comes again and again to meet us and to press for an answer. We hear it sounding from out the life of every good man we meet, it rings in our ears at every Mass, it meets us in every call to self-sacrifice, it demands a decision in every moment of temptation. Living or dying, we can by no means escape from this personal, practical, persistent question: 'What shall I do with Jesus that is called Christ?'

Once more, this is surely pre-eminently a question for Christmas Day. We are inevitably brought face

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to face with it on the birthday of Jesus Christ. At the Midnight Mass, faith linked to imagination carries us away to Bethlehem, and to the eye of the believing soul the walls of the church are transformed into the rough timbers of a stable, and from his cradle on the altar, the Infant Jesus, wrapped in the swaddling clothes of the Sacramental Species, stretches forth his tiny hands to us, demanding our worship, claiming our discipleship, pleading for our love. These are the Christmas claims of Christ, and on the response we make to them depends our answer to the question, 'What shall I do with Jesus ?'

II

First, then, from his Manger-Throne, Christ Jesus claims our worship. It is no mere saint, or teacher, or martyr, or benefactor of the human race whose birth we celebrate on this Festival. Christmas Day is the birthday of God made man ; the little baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger is none other than God over all, blessed for ever more. We need always to remember that Christ gave us a revelation of God not only by his words, but by his actions, not merely or mainly by what he said, but by what he was and did. He not only told us about God : he *was* God in human form. The Word, says S. John, was made Flesh. What word ? Why, the greatest word in human language, the word God. I can understand something of the meaning of that great word now ; Bethlehem and

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Galilee, Calvary and Olivet, have made it wonderfully plain.

And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the Creed of Creeds,
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More high than all poetic thought.

That is the great glory of the Incarnation. It shows us God ; it expresses his character in the terms of a human life. When we wonder what God is like, we have only to look at Jesus. When we wonder what God would do, we have only to inquire what Jesus did. When we puzzle our brains with abstruse metaphysical speculations as to the nature of the Deity, a voice says to us, ' You will never make much progress that way, but you can see God in Jesus Christ. Look at Jesus, study his life, bathe your soul in the white radiance of his perfect character, and you will know what God is like. For he that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father.'

Yes, Jesus is God : that is the foundation truth of the Christian Faith. And because he is God, he demands our worship and will be satisfied with nothing less. Do not insult Christ by offering him your admiration ; he will have none of it. You can admire man, but you cannot admire God. With him it must be worship or nothing ; there is no possible alternative that he will accept. What, then, shall we do with Jesus that is called Christ on his Birthday ? Shall we worship him ? I trow we shall. Before ever we think of ourselves, of the

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tremendous, the unspeakable difference the Incarnation has made for us ; before ever we ask, for ourselves and for others, those Christmas blessings which the Saviour is so ready, so anxious, to bestow upon us, it is our pride, our joy, our delight to bow down with the shepherds in profoundest homage and adoration before the Manger-Throne of the Incarnate Christ, and to join with the Universal Church in earth and Heaven in her great Christmas anthem of praise and worship : 'We praise thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thee thanks for thy great glory. For thou only art holy, thou only art the Lord, thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost art most high in the glory of God the Father.'

III

Secondly, Christ Jesus claims our discipleship. Perfect God, he is also perfect Man, the mirror in which we can see what human life can be and ought to be. If as God I must worship him, as man I must take him as my pattern, and, especially on Christmas Day, I must try to follow the example of his great humility. The crib is the symbol of the lowliness of Jesus ; the humble circumstances of his birth translate the self-abasement involved in the Incarnation into terms which we can understand.

Our Lord once told us to go and sit down in the lowest room ; at Bethlehem he practised what he taught. He once warned us that except we become

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as little children we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Surely he had the right to say it, who himself became a little child. If you would realise the humility of God, look at the last little helpless infant born into the world, and think that such was once the Lord Jesus Christ. From his lowly cradle, the Babe of Bethlehem preaches to us the beauty of humility, and reminds us that, before we can hope to be with him in his glory, we must become, in heart and spirit, little children too.

Is not that a lesson we all of us need to learn? Pride is the parent stem on which all the other deadly sins are grafted; and pride is in all of us, in the poor as well as in the rich, in the young as much as in the old, manifesting its presence in an almost infinite variety of ways. How promptly we respond to flattery, how delighted we are if people speak well of us, how bitterly we resent it if we are slighted, or rebuked, how quick we are to take offence, how envious of others, how eager to belittle them! We find it almost impossible to admit that we are ever in the wrong; we think so much of our own opinion, and are wounded if others do not take our advice. We despise commonplace tasks, we do our good deeds to be seen of men, we are so easily fascinated, poor creatures that we are, by titles, and wealth, and position, and success. So universal is pride, so congenial to our human weakness, so terribly difficult to overcome. And, surely, this is the reason why the earthly life of Jesus begins in the Manger. He suffered himself to be laid in that lowly crib, that

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he might woo us to the practice of humility by his own most beautiful example. As we think of his hands stretched out to Mary in imploring dependence, of his voice crying with cold in the manger stall, how poor, how mean, how worthless, how infinitely petty and degraded seem our conceit, our vanity, our self-satisfaction ! It will mean a real step forward on our path Heavenward if we make it our Christmas resolution that so often as we are tempted to plume ourselves on our talents, our position, our achievements, our success, we will pay a visit in spirit to the Manger, and, gazing at the Eternal Son of the Father, born in poverty and nakedness, pray for grace to follow the example of his great humility.

IV

Once more, from his Christmas Cradle, Christ Jesus claims our love. He presents himself to us there, not only as our God and our Saviour, but as our Baby Brother. He embodies in himself that most sweet and tender relationship, and pleads for our love in the appealing, the irresistible accents of his baby voice. What, then, shall we do with this Jesus who asks for our love ? Shall we give it to him ? Ah ! how can we help it ? How could we refuse to love him who loved us so much that he laid aside his glory, and took upon him our nature, and was born as a helpless infant that he might save us from our sins and unite us to himself ? Surely, the cry must be wrung from our hearts, just as truly

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at the Manger of Bethlehem as on Calvary beneath the shadow of the Cross : 'We love because he first loved us.'

And how can we show our love to him at Christmas ? For remember, to repeat what I have said already, this is a practical matter. The question is, What shall we *do* ? Has not he himself told us what to do ? 'A new commandment,' he said, 'I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples.' Let us take the spirit of Christ-love into our hearts and homes this Christmas. Let us crush down our selfishness, our quarrelsomeness, and bitter tempers. Let us be kind and self-forgetting and thoughtful for others ; for our parents and children and brothers and sisters. Let us be generous and charitable to the poor and friendless. Let us do our utmost to make Christmas a happy time for the children, for the sake of the Babe of Bethlehem. So shall we show that our hearts are full of love and gratitude to him who himself was a little child, and poor and friendless, and outcast and in want, and who has said : 'Inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto me.'

DON'T WORRY

‘Be not anxious for the morrow.’

S. MATTHEW vi. 34

I

HERE is a saying of our Saviour Christ that may well occupy our attention on New Year's Day, while we stand as by some milestone on an unfamiliar road and speculate as to the probable course and vicissitudes of our future journey. The words may seem unfamiliar to some of us, for they are taken from the Revised Version. The Authorised Version reads, ‘Take no thought for the morrow’—a very misleading translation, which might be taken to sanction thriftlessness and imprudence. The Greek word means, literally, Do not let your mind be distracted or divided; and it may perhaps be best rendered into the language of to-day by the two words, Don't Worry.

Don't Worry! This is a precept that, in one form or another, was often on the lips of our Saviour and his Apostles: and it is a very valuable precept, for worry is a singularly unprofitable temper of mind.

First, it is utterly futile. Nothing is ever accomplished by anxiety. On the contrary, it always

DON'T WORRY

weakens and wears us out. Under a habit of anxiety, the body loses its vigour, the mind its tone, the will its force, the heart its sweetness. What friction is to the working of a machine, that worry is to the effectiveness of a human life. To fret and worry over the future is to waste the powers of resistance which we need to overcome the difficulties of the present. As Charles Kingsley well says somewhere: 'Do to-day's duty, fight to-day's temptation, and do not weaken and distract yourself by looking forward to things which you cannot see, and could not understand if you saw them.'

Again, anxiety is often the open door to sin. Thousands of people make shipwreck of their lives by needless worry and anxiety. The worried man is the easily tempted man. He is ready to accept any relief, to take advantage of any means of lightening the intolerable pressure on his mind and soul. Thus one man takes to drink, not because he is a drunkard, but because he wants to forget his troubles. Another embezzles, not because he is a thief, but because he wants a short cut out of his financial worries. One woman sells herself body and soul in a loveless marriage, not because she wants to be married, but in order to escape from the anxiety of being without a home of her own. Another flings back her life in the face of God, in the cowardice and terrible wickedness of suicide, not because she is in love with the pale face of death, but because constant anxiety has made her utterly weary of life.

Moreover, anxiety utterly spoils our prayers.

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The secret of effective prayer is freedom from distraction, complete concentration of mind. Who can concentrate his mind when it is filled with anxieties and forebodings about the future? Which of us does not know in our own experience how often our prayers are utterly spoilt by our failure to cast out of our minds our daily cares and worries? How many times have we not risen from our knees, having said our prayers without thinking of one single word that has passed our lips, simply because our minds have been completely occupied with our troubles and anxieties?

Once more, anxiety does great damage to the cause of Christ. A sad, miserable, anxious, complaining temper is no good argument for the Catholic religion. People are not very likely to be attracted to Jesus Christ if they see that communicants are just as fretful as other people, just as impatient, just as worried, just as easily bowed by the storms of adversity, as others who have no God in whom to trust, no golden promises on which to lean. It is the great claim of our Divine Redeemer that he gives peace and rest to those who trust in him. And it is our business to show that that claim is verified in experience by letting men feel, shining out of us, the joy and confidence which come from close communion with God.

II

Since, then, anxiety brings such obvious evils in its train, since it accomplishes nothing, leads on to

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open acts of sin, weakens us, and hinders our usefulness, utterly spoils our prayers, and does great damage to the cause of Christ, we shall all agree that the precept, Don't Worry ! is a very valuable piece of advice. I pass on to remind you that it is a very necessary piece of advice for most of us. The busy, nerve-racking strain of our modern city life makes us peculiarly susceptible to worry, and our ordinary tendency in this direction has, of course, been grievously aggravated by the awful shock of the war, from which, after eleven years, the world is so slowly recovering. Human society as a whole is suffering from a chronic attack of nerves, and worry is the one thing which distinguishes it in all its grades.

And how easily worrying can become a habit! Are we not always meeting people who seem to have an absolute genius for making the most of all the prosaic troubles of life? Their whole time is occupied in turning microscopic molehills into gigantic mountains. At first, perhaps, your sympathy is touched by the look of distress which is always on their faces, and the tone of despair in which they speak. But soon you discover that they are no worse off than other people. They eat well and sleep well ; they have no severe sickness in the house ; they are not in danger of bankruptcy ; their children are not idiots or cripples. Why are they so wretchedly anxious ? It is simply because they have got into the habit of worrying. They see everything through the distorting glasses of pessimism, and mistake their own sombre impressions for hard

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realities. Dickens has described this type of the worrying soul in his picture of Mrs. Gummidge in *David Copperfield*, the 'lone, lorn creetur, with whom everythink went contrairy,' and of whom David said that 'she whimpered sometimes more than was comfortable for other parties; and there were moments when it would have been more agreeable, I thought, if Mrs. Gummidge had had a convenient apartment of her own to retire to, and had stopped there until her spirits revived.'

Well, we may not—I hope we do not—belong to the family of Gummidge; and yet I suppose there are few of us who can look forward to the coming year without being tempted to anxiety. If we were to stand up now, one after another, and tell out our forebodings and anxieties, what worried people we should find ourselves to be! One would say, 'It is the eternal bread-and-butter question with me. I have just managed to get through this year; but, if this trade depression continues much longer, I shall infallibly go under.' Another would say, 'I am greatly worried about the children. John is not happy in his place, and Jane is not getting on very well at school, and the little one has been in very bad health lately.' Another perhaps would tell of his anxiety for some friend or relative who is lying at death's door; another of acute spiritual depression, and of the awful misgiving that the Catholic religion is not really true, but only a pretty fairy-story after all. And, added to all these things, there are the everyday anxieties

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that we all share in common, the little constant cares and worries of home and business life. Trifling things, it may be, but, strangely enough, it is the trifling worries of life that fret us far more than the big ones.

III

‘Be not anxious for the morrow.’ It is valuable advice. It is necessary advice. But I suppose we all feel that it is very difficult advice to follow. It is not an easy thing to stop worrying, especially if we happen to be of an anxious temperament. It is easy enough to sing, ‘Cast care aside,’ but well we know it is easier to sing it than to do it. No one can shake off anxiety simply by trying to shake it off. Neither can it be done merely by arguing to ourselves as to its hurtfulness and uselessness. Nor yet can it be done by hardening ourselves into an unfeeling, stoical indifference, so that we don’t care what happens. There are some people, indeed, who think that it cannot be done at all, and who regard our text as only the beautiful expression of an unattainable ideal. We shall not think that, when we remember who it was who spoke these words. Depend upon it, our Blessed Saviour would not have told us not to be anxious about to-morrow unless it were possible to carry his precept into effect. Thank God, it *is* possible to get rid of anxiety about the future, and that in three main ways :

First, we must trust in the gracious, loving providence of God. New Year’s Day is the Octave

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of Christmas, and Christmas has been termed the Feast of the Divine Providence. The great Mystery of the Incarnation, the taking our nature upon him by the Only-Begotten Son of God, this is the stupendous proof of the eternal love of God which presides, though not always visibly, in nature and in history. If 'God so loved the world that he gave his Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life', then, surely, it is not difficult to believe that he will guide and guard us through all the troubles and difficulties of our journey onwards to our Eternal Home. As we kneel at the Christmas Crib we *know* that God loves us, that he understands our wants, and feels our troubles, and knows all about our anxieties. Let us try to take with us through the coming year the thought that God loves us ; let us try to realise more and more in our own experience what we so often say with our lips, that God is *our* Father. The great cure for anxiety, the great antidote to worry of every kind, is to believe that God loves us, and that underneath us are the Everlasting Arms. No troubles, even the very greatest, can finally crush us, if only we are persuaded that 'neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Secondly, if we would stop worrying, we must live in a spirit of prayer. 'Be anxious about nothing,'

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says S. Paul, 'but in everything let your requests be made known to God'; and then this result will follow, 'the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' The alternative to worry is not blind inactivity or careless indifference. The mind must rest on something in its besetment by care, and that something is prayer. Prayer is the great conquering force against worry. Make it a principle of your life to kneel night and morning and hold communion with God, not as a mere mendicant or a repeater of the words of others, but as an individual who submerges his personality in the Divine Nature, and so you shall be lifted into that region whose atmosphere is peace, the peace that passeth understanding.

Lastly, if we would get rid of worry, let us act on the great principle Christ has given us, and live by the day, making its little horizon the boundary-line of our endeavours. The habit of living ahead, as so many of us do, prevents us from getting the full enjoyment of the happiness and blessing that are ours to-day. 'I learned, alas! when it was almost too late,' says Mark Rutherford in his autobiography, 'to live in each moment as it passed over my head, believing that the sun as it is now rising is as good as it ever will be.' The only way really to live the Christian life is to live it a day at a time. We may alter the old proverb and say, 'Take care of to-day, and to-morrow will take care of itself. If only we will try to carry out God's Will to-day we shall surely find that fresh supplies of his grace will

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be ready for us when we face the troubles of to-morrow.

So, as we look forward to the New Year, let us not be worried or anxious about it. We do not know the future, but we do know the God of the future, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. What he has been to us in the past, what he is in the present, that we may be sure he will be in the future. If only we will repose on his love with prayer and confidence, we shall find that each day, as it brings its duties and worries, will bring also grace and strength necessary to meet them. 'His compassions fail not, they are new every morning.'

THE WAGGON AND THE STAR

‘We have seen his Star.’

S. MATTHEW ii. 2

I

THE story of the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem, which has from the very first been connected with the Epiphany season, is one of the most romantic and beautiful incidents in the Gospel. The simple style in which it is told, with all but the barest details omitted, leaves ample scope to the imagination, and perhaps, as a consequence, legend has been busier with this than with any other event in the Gospel story. We are told, for instance, that the star sparkled more brilliantly than all the others in the sky, and that the moon and all the other stars formed, as if in homage, a choir around it as it moved. As to the Magi themselves, from time immemorial they have been regarded as Kings :

We three Kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts, we traverse far,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

Gradually, the legend of the Kings became stereotyped and consecrated by art. They are represented

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as arriving at Jerusalem attended by a magnificent retinue. The Venerable Bede tells us their names, and, guided probably by some contemporary picture, describes their appearance. Melchior was an old man with white hair and a long beard ; Caspar, a ruddy and beardless youth ; Balthazar, swarthy and in the prime of life. Later still come all the stories connected with them after their death. For centuries their bodies rested in the great Church of S. Sophia at Constantinople, now a Mohammedan mosque. Thence their bones were transferred, first to Milan, and afterwards to Cologne, where one of the most magnificent cathedrals in the world was built to enshrine them, and where from time to time they are still exposed for the devout adoration of the faithful.

‘Mere legend, all this,’ you say. Ah ! do not speak in that contemptuous voice. No one who understands anything of the true principles of education will be ready to despise folk-lore as worthless. Folk-lore is the history book of the imagination ; often it shows us, as nothing else could, the real significance of historical events. It gives them atmosphere and colour, it turns a photograph into a picture, it lights up the dull landscape of history with the warm sunshine of romance. So with this story of the Magi. Art and legend, in embellishing it, have done much to draw out its true meaning and significance. The traditions about the Wise Men from the East may not be true in the letter, but they are surely true in the spirit. They help

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us to appreciate and understand the profound spiritual meaning of the story. That meaning, as I take it, is twofold. First, each one of us has a guiding star ; and, secondly, if we follow it faithfully, it will bring us to the feet of Christ.

II

First, each one of us has a guiding star. The wise men saw their portent in the sky, where their training and education led them to look for it, for the Magians were a caste of Persian priests, followers of Zoroaster, and chiefly distinguished by being worshippers of the stars and students of astronomy. The historians Tacitus and Suetonius tell us that a rumour was current throughout the East which pointed to Judea as the birthplace of a great world-ruler, and it seems probable that these Persian sages, gazing up into the starry heavens from their Eastern watch-tower, discovered a new or hitherto unobserved star, which from its peculiar position in the sky they associated with the birth of this expected King. Astrology, as we know, is a false science. There is no such connection between the stars and the affairs of men as astrologers have supposed. But it was the only light the Magi had, and, faithful to it, they were brought through its guidance to a higher truth. ‘ For when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the King, behold there came Wise Men from the

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East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him.'

We have seen his star. I venture to say there is not one of us who has not shared that experience. At some time or another, whether it be in youth, as with Caspar, or in the prime of life, as with Balthazar, or in old age, as with Melchior, it comes to everyone, the dream, the vision, the inspiration, the ideal, the sense of a finger pointing, and of a voice calling upward to a higher life: 'This is the way, walk ye in it.' We may not number all the stars. One man's star differeth from another in glory. God fulfils himself in many ways: he sends to each a vision which each can understand. As Lowell finely puts it:

To each in his mercy, hath God allowed
His several pillar of fire and cloud.

No! we cannot number all the stars, but, at any rate, I can remind you of some of them, familiar constellations, that have guided many a wanderer to Jesus, and to which we too may hitch our waggon if we will.

For instance, there is the Star of Christian Character; no miraculous light gleaming in the distant sky, but a luminous aura shining round the life of some good man or woman whom we know. What a power there is in simple goodness, to draw men heavenward! Words may be misunderstood,

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and actions may be misinterpreted, but the light that radiates from a soul trying to live up to the highest that he knows, touches and blesses all who come near to him. That is the debt we owe to the blessed Saints of God. Ever from out the past their lives come shining down to us, attracting us to Christ, who made them what they were. And this is true not only of the Saints of olden time, but of the saints of to-day. I am sure you can draw upon your own experience for illustrations of what I mean ; you can think of someone whom you know who is in truth fulfilling the commission of Jesus : ' Ye are the light of the world,' whose life is all-luminous with the presence of God. Think of your friend and all you owe to him. He is not particularly clever, it may be ; he is no hero and no teacher ; the phrases of religion are not often on his lips ; and yet God shines out of him. It does you good to be with him, your weak and drooping faith rests firm against the strong pillars of his certain trust ; in his presence, altogether independent of anything he may say, all that is best in you is somehow drawn to the top, and you feel it natural to admire and to long for all that is lovely and of good report. Why, I suppose there is not one of us who does not owe his knowledge of Christ, his love for Christ, his devotion to Christ, to the help, the guidance, the inspiration, the example of some good man or woman whom God in his great love has sent to us to guide us to his Son ; I suppose there is not one of us who in this sense cannot say with the Wise Men from

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the East : We have come to worship him, for we have seen his Star.

Or there is the Star of Service. I mean by this the light that shines into a man's soul when he realises for the first time the high and solemn purpose of life. Cannot you remember such an experience, when in some moment of depression and disillusionment your whole soul cried out in revolt against the futility, the emptiness, the dreary monotony of your existence ? ' Has God created me,' you said to yourself, ' for nothing better than this : to get up in the morning, and go to business ; to slave at a desk or in a shop ; or to wash cups and plates that will be made dirty again, or to mend clothes that will be torn again, or to darn stockings that will soon be worn into holes again ; to face the endless fret and worry of how to make both ends meet ; for amusement to go to an occasional dance or to the pictures : to bear and bring up children who shall repeat my aimless, futile existence ? Surely life has something more satisfying to offer than this. I have an intellect, a soul, a personality, some independence of character, some capacity for high achievement, but it is all being crushed out of me by the cruel tyranny of petty circumstances.' And then, amid the black night of your depression, there shone out, suddenly, a gleaming star of hope. You caught a vision of what your life was meant to be, and might be. Through some word of Scripture, through the voice of some preacher ; through the haunting cadence of some remembered poem—

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God spoke to your soul. He opened your eyes to see the inner meaning and purpose of your work. He showed you that the routine, the drudgery, the hardship, which seemed to be slowly pressing the life out of you, were in reality his instruments for the formation of your character, his opportunities for the unselfish service of your fellow-men. What a wonderful difference it makes to a man's whole outlook when he grasps the great truth that life is a vocation, a call to the service of God : that, however dull and prosaic his surroundings, there is always, as Browning beautifully says, 'A glory in the grey,' an opportunity for the expression of all that is noblest in him, a chance to make his little corner of the world a better, brighter, sweeter, happier place, because he happens to have lived in it. The Star of Service—it burns with an unearthly radiance, its glittering rays transfigure the humblest tasks of life and make them beautiful. Yes, and it points the way to Bethlehem. There at last it rests over the Cradle of him who, by his own most beautiful example, has made the common tasks of life glorious and honourable for ever.

Once more, there is the Star of Catholic Worship. For thousands of men and women that has been the determining influence that has brought them to Christ. Well do I remember the church of my childhood's days, its high galleries, its varnished pews, its hideous architecture, the texts and patterns disfiguring the walls, the altar with its mean and insignificant appointments. I can see myself, a

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pathetic little figure, listening Sunday by Sunday to the unending drone of Matins and Litany and Ante-Communion, wondering wistfully what it was all about, and turning over the pages of my Prayer Book to see how much of the service still remained to be endured. And then, when I was twelve years old, God sent me his Star. A holiday at Brighton, S. Bartholomew's Church on the Sunday in the octave of the Patronal feast, the splendid ceremonial, the candles, the vestments, the incense, the altar in its beauty, the deep note of the Sanctus bell, and then the solemn hush, teaching me for the first time what worship really meant, speaking to my soul through my every sense of the majesty and the beauty of God. Though I should live to be a hundred, that experience will never lose its vividness. I can see the very faces of the servers, as they passed by me in the procession. And among the many influences that have gone to make me what I am, I count in a foremost place my first vision of Catholic Worship. It transformed church attendance from a nightmare of tedious misery to a dream of beauty and splendour ; it sent me forth on the search for Christ ; it guided me to his blessed feet. It was my Star.

III

Thus to some in one form and to some in another, but to all of us at some time and in some fashion, the Magi's Star gleams brightly in the sky. We have all seen it, not once but a hundred times ; some

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word, some example, some service, some deep inward aspiration, arousing us out of our lethargy and indifference, awaking within us the spirit of a divine discontent, bidding us gird ourselves and journey forth on the road that leads to Bethlehem. Yes, we have seen the Star, but have we followed it? Can we say with S. Paul: 'I was not disobedient unto the Heavenly Vision'? There is a strange Russian legend which tells us that the Wise Men, on their way to Bethlehem, stopped at the house of an old woman, the Baboushka. "There is the Star of the new-born King," they said, pointing to it. "Come with us, for we go to worship him." "I will follow you later," she said, "when I have set my house in order." But when her work was done, the Three Kings had passed on their way across the desert, and the star shone no more in the darkened sky. All through the centuries, she has been searching for the Christ Child. It is she who in Russian homes fills the stockings and dresses the tree on Christmas Eve. The children are awakened with the cry "Behold the Baboushka!" and spring up, hoping to see her before she vanishes out of the window. She fancies, the tradition goes, that in each poor little one to whom she brings her gifts she may find the Child she neglected long ago, but she is doomed to eternal disappointment.

Now, in one sense, that legend is not true to the spirit of the Christian Faith. I am sure that the Baboushka long ago found him who is the Friend of little children, and who has said: 'Inasmuch as ye

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do it unto one of the least of these, ye do it unto me.' But in another sense the strange old story represents the tragedy of many a life. How often, alas ! we see the Star in the East only to ignore it ; we catch the fair vision of glorious possibilities, and turn away sorrowful, like the rich young ruler. What infinite pathos breathes through these lines of William Watson :

So on our souls the visions rise
Of that fair life we never led,
They flash a splendour past our eyes,
We start, and they are fled.
They pass, and leave us with blank gaze
Resigned to our ignoble days.

Or if we have not ignored our star altogether, it may be we have been content to gaze upon it, to be satisfied with splendid conceptions and ideals, without making any effort to realise them, to make character or service or worship an end in themselves, instead of using them as means to achieve the only complete and satisfying purpose of life, the union of the soul with Christ. I have spoken, for instance, of the Star of Catholic worship, and God knows what an inspiration and blessing it can be. But in its very beauty and attractiveness there lies the danger that we may rest in it, that we may mistake the star that leads to Christ for Christ himself. The Magi, had they been content with admiring the brilliancy of the star, would never have found the Saviour, and it is the same with us. The beautiful ceremonies of our religion, our sacraments, our music, our services,

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will prove a hindrance, and not a help, if we value them for what they are in themselves, instead of using them as guides to bring us closer to our Blessed Lord. What does your church-going mean for you ? Does it make Christ more real to you, does it make you feel that he is close to you, does it guide you into his Presence, and move you to lay your treasures at his feet ? That is the only test of its reality. To rest in its outward forms, to regard it as an exhibition of attractive sights, or a mere concert of pleasant sounds, what is that but to worship the star, instead of using it as a guide to the Saviour ?

IV

Nay ! we may not ignore our star, and we must not worship it ; we must follow it, or, in the words of the old phrase, we must ' hitch our waggon ' to it. That is what the Magi did, and therein they are our example. They made a real effort, they took a long journey, they experienced many disappointments ; but day by day they followed in the direction in which the star shone, until at last they reached their goal. So it must be with us, if we in truth desire an Epiphany. I quoted just now some of the saddest lines in English poetry ; let me contrast them with some of the bravest and most inspiring. It is Tennyson's Merlin who is speaking :

O young Mariner,
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel
And crowd your canvas ;

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And ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow the Gleam !

Follow the gleam ! That is the stirring message of Epiphany. It speaks not to the sober, unromantic, passionless side of us that we show to the world, but to the restless, unsatisfied longing of our souls, that cries out for something nobler than buying and selling and eating and drinking and sleeping. Follow the gleam ! hitch your waggon to the star, set out on the search for him who has come that you might have life and have it more abundantly. It will mean effort and struggle and self-sacrifice ; the yielding up, perchance, of some long-cherished prejudice, the break with some hampering sin, the casting off of some clogging weight of sloth, the crucifixion of some ignoble purpose. But only follow faithfully, and the quest is sure. The star which you saw in the east will lead you on ' o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent ' till it rests at last over the Eternal Home where Jesus awaits your coming. That is the true point to which our thought and effort must ever be directed, and every step that brings us nearer to it makes life better worth the living, and eternity better worth the hoping for. ' For the path of the just is as a burning light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'

AN OLD TESTAMENT LOVE-STORY

‘Jacob served seven years for Rachel ; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.’

GENESIS XXIX. 20

I

‘**L**ENT again ! Lent with its dull services and duller sermons. Lent with its mournful penitential appeals to those who will not repent for sins in which they have ceased to believe. Lent tyrannically forbidding harmless amusements, impertinently interfering in my daily life, laying down restrictions about eating and drinking, and marking for me on every side a limit which I am not to pass. Lent casting a purple veil over the joy of religion, and preaching about nothing but sin and repentance. *I don't mean to trouble about Lent !*’

So speaks one of the two voices which are continually quarrelling within us. The other voice, the voice of our higher self, answers in a very different strain. ‘Thank God for Lent,’ it says : ‘I welcome it, with its rich and varied spiritual opportunities. Have you no eye for the beauty of contrast ? Can you not appreciate the divine

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artistry that paints the Liturgical Year in ever-changing colours? A year of Feasts would be as uninteresting and as monotonous as a year of Fasts. Take away Lent and Passiontide, and you rob Easter of its glory. Shadow and sunshine, purple and cloth of gold, the violets of penitence and the lilies of the Resurrection, need each other, balance each other, make up together the harmonious symmetry of the proportion of the Faith. How spiritually unimaginative to grumble about Lent!

As Catholics, then, we welcome Lent as the necessary contrast to the joys of Easter. We do not despise its invitations to prayer and fasting and almsgiving as the relics of an expiring superstition, or the broken shackles of an antiquated slavery. We are grateful for the warnings it gives us and the demands it makes upon us. We rejoice that we are once again especially invited to take up our cross and bear it after our crucified Redeemer. We enter on these few weeks of solemn observance in the spirit of hopeful and romantic purpose in which Jacob entered on his service, when he served seven years for Rachel. 'and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.'

II

Let us dwell for a little while on that exquisite love-story whose actors lived and died in the early dawn of Old Testament history, as a parable of the Christian's Lenten attitude. It is a story of much

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hardship and self-denial. 'Thus I was,' said Jacob to Laban long afterwards, 'in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from mine eyes. God hath seen my affliction, and the labour of mine hands.' Jacob served Laban as a shepherd, and his work necessarily entailed exposure, sleeplessness, hardship, and suffering.

The Church intends that the seven weeks of Lent should be to us in some small degree, at any rate, what those seven years of service were to Jacob. In primitive times the Lenten fast was observed with great strictness and rigour. 'There are those,' says S. Chrysostom, 'who rival one another in fasting, and show a marvellous emulation in it ; some indeed who spend two whole days without food at a time ; and others who reject from their tables not only the use of wine and oil, but of every dish except bread and water, and persevere in this practice during the whole of Lent.' There were constant daily sermons at the services ; public entertainments were strictly forbidden ; and works of charity were engaged in by all who could undertake them. It was a time, too, when sinners were called upon to do public penance, that they might be received back to Communion at Easter. Lent was, in fact, a season of humiliation, abstinence from pleasure, fasting, prayer, penitence, and general depression of tone on account of sin ; and was marked on every side with the sombre tokens of mourning.

Let us pass on to thirteen centuries later, and see

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how Lent was kept by religious people in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. A prominent layman of that day was Robert Nelson, who helped to found both the Society for Christian Knowledge and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. He was for a time associated with the Non-jurors, and wrote a book called *A Companion to the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England*, which passed through edition after edition during the next hundred and fifty years, and was much used and valued by the early Tractarians. This is what he says about Lent: 'The design of the Church in this Order is that these forty days should be set apart as a proper season for mortification and the exercise of self-denial; to humble and afflict ourselves by frequent fastings, and to punish our too often abuses of God's creatures by abstinence, and by forbearing the lawful enjoyment of them; to form and settle firm purposes of holy obedience; to pray frequently to God, both in private and public, for pardon and his Holy Spirit; to put us in mind of that sore trial and temptation which Christ then endured for our sakes. We cannot in these days endure the privations which the primitive Christians loved to practise, yet everyone should spend some part of the time in fasting and abstinence, according to the circumstances of his health and outward condition in the world, and this with a design to deny and punish himself, and to express his humiliation before God for his past transgressions. The ornaments of attire may be laid aside as improper

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to express the sense of mourners ; and the frequency of paying and receiving visits may be interrupted as unseasonable when our minds are oppressed with sorrow. Public assemblies for pleasure and diversion should be avoided ; the public devotions should be constantly attended ; we should be liberal in our alms, and very ready to employ ourselves in all opportunities of relieving either the temporal or spiritual wants of our neighbours. And we should frequently exercise ourselves in the meditation of divine subjects, the best means to make all discourses from the Press and from the pulpit effectual to our salvation.'

Remember that these words were written at one of the darkest periods in the history of the English Church, when religious life in this country was almost at its lowest ebb, and spiritual privileges such as we take for granted to-day were unknown. Do they not point a striking and most significant contrast to the Lent of the average twentieth-century Catholic ? What is my own Lent rule like ? Will it by the self-sacrifice it will entail help me to enter in some far-off way into the sufferings of my Saviour ? Or is it an indulgent rule which will make no demands on my powers of self-control, and which has been framed simply to still the feeble stirrings of a half-awakened conscience ? If so, it needs a strict and stern revision. Jesus Christ always demands our best ; he will never be satisfied with less. He came into the world, serving for three and thirty years to win his Bride the Church, a

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better Jacob serving for a better Rachel. He took on him the form of a servant, and lived a life of suffering which mortal mind can never measure either by experience or by imagination. He calls us during Lent to follow in his steps, to present not our souls only, but our bodies also, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. He invites us to be with him in his fast of forty days in the wilderness ; with him in his nightly prayers on the bleak hillside ; with him in his Agony in the Garden ; with him in his loneliness when forsaken by his disciples ; with him in his hunger and thirst and cold ; with him in his death-agony and last expiring cry. He wants our Lenten self-denial to be something we shall really feel ; not the nominal abstinence from pleasures in which we seldom indulge. He wants our Lenten prayers to entail real effort, and real expenditure of time and trouble and convenience. He wants our Lenten alms-giving to be the outcome of real self-sacrifice and self-denial. It is for us to accept willingly the cross he offers, and bending under its weight, to take our place in the procession of voluntary suffering which winds its way through the valley of Lenten self-discipline, upward to the hill of Calvary.

III

Jacob served seven years for Rachel. If the nature of his service was hardship and self-denial, the motive of his service was love. His love-story is a real romance ; beneath the terse, epigrammatic,

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Biblical language, we can feel the throbbing of a tense, emotional experience. Seven years of service seemed to him, we are told, but a few days for the love he had unto her. It was not the first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart, nor the passing fancy of a fickle and susceptible lad. It was the passionate devotion of a strong man fixed irrevocably on one object.

If Lent is to be to us anything more than a galling and unprofitable slavery, it must be inspired by a burning spirit of devotion to Jesus Christ. The Church in her deep wisdom has ordered that the Epistle for the Sunday before Lent should be that great passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians which speaks of love as the one thing needful. 'Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.' It is a reminder to us as we stand on the threshold of Lent that all our acts of self-denial are nothing worth if they have not love as their motive-power. We may as well tear up our Lent rule unless love for Jesus be written as its title. Surely, if we love our Lord even a little, we shall feel every demand upon our time and energies and thoughts as too small, too poor to bestow. 'The Church is the Bride of Christ,' says an old writer; 'can she rejoice when the Bridegroom is suffering? He is an hungered; shall she fare sumptuously every day, forgetting that they gave him gall and vinegar? He is stripped of his raiment; it is no time for her to be arrayed in vesture

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of gold wrought about with divers colours. He is dying ; let her for a while sit as a widow, weeping for his death, and for her own unfaithfulness which slew him.'

Let us make love for Jesus the guiding principle of Lent, and the guiding principle of our lives. It is the master-key which unlocks the Gates of Heaven. On the closing page of the Gospel, there is contained an examination paper intended to test proficiency in discipleship. It is set by our Saviour himself, it contains only three questions, and they are all alike. Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me ? Lovest thou me ? Lovest thou me ? Christianity can only have its perfect work in us, as we set ourselves to learn the lesson of personal devotion to Jesus.

Let me, then, suggest two very practical ways in which we may increase our love for our Lord during Lent. First, when we say our daily prayers, let us spend a minute or two in thinking about his sufferings. We may, for instance, look steadfastly at the Crucifix, and try to realise something of the agony of body and mind which it represents. Or we may take one of the Sorrowful Mysteries—the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, the Crucifixion—as the subject of our meditation. I do not think it would be possible for any one of us to do that regularly, each day in Lent, without gaining a deeper and more intense devotion to Jesus. Love to him is, as a rule, the outcome of a consciousness of his

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love to us. As S. John says : 'We love, because he first loved us.'

Then let us make a rule to attend at least one week-day Mass each week in Lent. For some that is impossible, for many it is difficult, but, with a little thought and arrangement, it is within the power of most. Unquestionably, it is the best of all Lent rules to make. It may sometimes be true that absence makes the heart grow fonder, but it is certainly not true about communion with our Lord. It is as we kneel before his Altar Throne, as we plead his Sacrifice, as we hold close fellowship with him, as we receive him into ourselves, that our hearts burn within us, and we are able to say in the communion of an intimate experience, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.'

IV

We pass on to consider the result of Jacob's service in the development and formation of his character. Jacob, the spoilt child, the mother's darling, the crafty supplanter of his brother, was a very different person from Israel, the Prince of God, who, returning from exile, wrestled and prevailed with God. Hardship was the furnace in which his character had been purified ; self-denial the hammer which had beaten it into shape. His service of patient endurance, willingly undertaken for love of Rachel, conquered his selfishness, strengthened his will, and brought into prominence the nobler side of his character.

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The Bible and the history of the Saints teach us what the experience of all mankind confirms, that suffering is the school of character. 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' I do not say suffering always purifies ; I expect we have all known cases where it has not done so. But, on the other hand, which of us has not come into touch with some life that has been completely transfigured, not by the glad radiance of joy, but by the shadow of the cross of pain ? How many shallow people pain has deepened ! How many hard hearts has it made tender ! And what is true of the individual is true also of the race. It is not through its pleasures, but through its pains, that the world is carried to its higher levels. It is through agony that we have won our poetry ; it is through blood that we have reached our freedom ; it is through the pain that was endured by Christ on Calvary that we are redeemed and forgiven.

It is a lesson, I know, we are slow to receive when all our thoughts seemed turned the other way, to get rid of suffering and banish pain and cushion life and make it comfortable, that God still signs the road that leads to excellence with the Sign of the Cross.

And if this be true of suffering generally, it is especially true of self-denial undertaken for love of our Lord. Our Lenten rules, if they are such as to make a real demand on us, and if we observe them strictly, will not end with themselves. They will have their result in the formation of character, and the strengthening of will-power. It seems a little

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thing to make a rule to get up half an hour earlier, for instance, and to have the strength to say No! to the body when it pleads for a little more time in bed. But it is a big thing if it teaches us to say No! to that besetting sin which is sapping our moral force, that overmastering habit we do not seem able to resist. Grumble about self-denial, or parade it, and it injures your moral sense; for all the tools of God have double edges. But accept it willingly for love's sweet sake, and it will chisel and shape you. You will find it to be one of the choicest instruments of purifying that are willed by the Love of Heaven.

V

We have thought of the nature of Jacob's service, hardship and self-denial; the motive of his service, love; the result of his service, the formation of his character. Consider finally the reward of his service, the winning of the woman he loved. Jacob served many weary years, but at length he won his bride; she whom he had loved so faithfully and waited for so patiently was his at last.

So we shall find our reward for the self-denial of Lent in the joy of Easter morning. With what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again. The joy of our Easter Communion will be in proportion to the reality of our Lenten sorrow. We must grieve for our sins with S. Mary Magdalene, if with her we would welcome the Risen Master in

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the glad silence of the Easter dawn. We must clasp to our heart the piercing sword of agony which transfixed our Lady, if with her we would hold the Saviour in our arms. 'Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' That is the message of Lent, and the message of the Christian life. For 'if we suffer we shall also reign with him'; and 'he that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.'

So may every day of Lent be bright with Easter expectation. The prince in the fairy-tale cuts his way through the forest of difficulty with his thoughts ever fixed on the goal of his endeavour, the ivory palace which raises its gilded spires to heaven in the sunshine of the distant hills. So let us pass through the gathering darkness of Lent and Holy Week, looking always to the beautiful light beyond, where Lenten shadows are swallowed up in the glittering sunshine of the Easter dawn, and the Risen Master stands upon the shore.

FORGIVENESS

‘Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.’ S. JOHN XX. 23

I

THE subject of forgiveness covers so wide a field, that in any brief survey of it it is important to practise what Stevenson called ‘the gentle art of omitting,’ and to begin by defining strictly the limits of discussion. For my present purpose I will put entirely on one side two objections which are commonly raised to the whole idea of forgiveness ; first, the objection that it is impossible because of the uniformity of natural law which makes it vain to attempt to intervene between an act and its consequence ; and, secondly, the objection that it is unnecessary, since man has no free-will, and therefore no real control over his actions : and I will take for granted two contrary Christian propositions ; first that God is all-powerful and all-loving, and therefore is both able and willing to forgive ; and, secondly, that man is responsible for his actions, and therefore is in need of forgiveness. Bearing these two propositions well in mind, we will think

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about forgiveness—first, as it is offered by God ; secondly, as it is claimed and appropriated by man.

Forgiveness begins with God ; it is a principle eternally active in his nature ; it flows forth spontaneously from his heart as the natural outcome of his love ; and it is offered as a free gift to man, not because of his deserving, but in spite of his undeserving. This free, forgiving love of God is revealed to us in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and finds its supreme expression in his death. We need to remember that Christ's whole life was a revelation of God's forgiving love, and that his death was just the perfect end to that life, and a part of it. It is the Incarnation which gives its meaning to the Cross. As we say in the Nicene Creed : ' For us men and for our salvation he came down from Heaven, and was Incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified for us.'

This great truth, that the free forgiveness of God is offered to man in and through the life and death of Jesus Christ, is the key to Christian theology, and the core of the Christian Faith, and it is supported by whole masses and circles of Bible teaching. Long centuries before the Incarnation, the prophet Isaiah pointed forward to the coming Messiah as one who would be bruised for our transgressions and wounded for our iniquities, on whom was to be laid the iniquity of us all. The name given to our Lord by divine authority is a prediction of his life-work. ' Thou shalt call his name Jesus,' said the

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Angel to S. Joseph, 'for he shall save his people from their sins.' The Baptist points Christ out to his disciples as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. The Saviour himself declares, in what is to many of us his most precious word, that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life'; he declares that he has come to give his life a ransom for many, that his Flesh is given for the life of the world, and his Blood is shed for the remission of sins. S. Peter tells us that Christ bare our sins in his own body on the Tree, and suffered the just for the unjust. S. Paul declares over and over again that Christ died for us, that he came into the world to save sinners, that he died for the ungodly. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is equally emphatic: 'Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.' S. John says that Christ is an offering for the sins of the whole world; and, in his vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, he sees as the centre of its worship a Lamb as it had been slain, and hears the Elders singing before the Throne, 'Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy Blood.' The predictions of prophets, the declarations of Apostles, the testimony of glorified Saints, the teaching of Jesus Christ himself, all unite in bearing witness to this central truth of the Christian Faith, that God's free forgiveness is revealed and offered to man in the Cross of the Incarnate Saviour.

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If this is Bible doctrine, it is Catholic doctrine too. It is not, I think, unjust or unfair to say that outside Catholicism the doctrine of the Atonement has altogether lost the prominence it used to hold among old-fashioned Protestants, and is tending to sink further and further into the background. But the Catholic compass never swerves in its direction. Its needle always points to Calvary, held there by the magnetic attraction of him who said, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' No one could possibly enter a Catholic church without realising that the Cross is absolutely central in our religious system. It is everywhere displayed; on our steeples, on our altars, at the entrance to our sanctuaries, over our pulpits and confessionals, above the graves of our departed. The Sign of the Cross was made on our foreheads at our Baptism, the priest constantly signs it over us in blessing, and we delight to trace it on our own bodies day by day, as the *Spes Unica*—the one hope of our salvation.

I have said that this is Bible doctrine, and Catholic doctrine. Let me add that it is experimental doctrine too, for it has been verified all through the ages by the highest Christian experience. Whether we consider the world-wide joy in the offering of Holy Mass which is the continual representation of the Passion, or consider the type of hymns which have been most popular, or the most popular subjects of religious art, we realise that, of all the great facts of Christianity, it is the death of Jesus which has gone deepest to the heart of man. As Keble sings in the

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beautiful poem for Good Friday in the Christian Year :

Is it not strange ; the darkest hour
That ever dawned on sinful earth,
Should touch the heart with softer power
For comfort than an angel's mirth ;
That to the Cross the mourner's eye should turn,
Sooner than where the stars of Christmas burn ?

Yes, it is strange, but it is true. Throughout the nineteen centuries which have rolled away since the death of Jesus, it has always been as men knelt before the Cross that they have been drawn to peace of conscience and righteousness of life. Exactly how Christ's death availed for the world's salvation we do not know, and it is idle and sometimes dangerous to speculate. I suppose that there has been more erroneous teaching about the Cross than about any other part of the Christian Faith. Men have taught, for instance, that the Father was unwilling to forgive, until his wrath was appeased by the Blood and sufferings of his Son ; as if Christ and the Father were two different Gods, the one kind and merciful, the other cruel and tyrannical, instead of being the same God, one in purpose, one in character, one in will, one in love. Others have said that because Christ died for our sins, man need do nothing for himself, and that his salvation is secured without any efforts of his own. Others, again, have taught that, because Christ suffered for our sins, we shall not have to suffer for them ourselves, forgetting that

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our Lord saves us not so much from the consequences of sin, as from sin itself, which, if persisted in, brings its inevitable consequences in its train. But, however men have erred in their theories about the Atonement, they have been one in their belief in its power. And this unity of belief, this oneness of experience, constitute in themselves an argument of a very powerful kind. We are more and more coming to recognise that man's reasonableness does not lie only or chiefly in what he can prove by rational argument, but as much, or more, in which is called his subconscious mind, that part of him which he has not yet learnt to express, but which is the ground of his emotional and instinctive life. The instinct that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself lies 'deep in the general heart of man,' and this fact in itself is a weighty evidence to its truth.

II

Now let us turn to the other aspect of our subject, and think about forgiveness as it is claimed by man. Forgiveness is a gift, and, like any other gift, it can be offered to all, but it can only be bestowed on those who are willing to accept it. That which another forces me to take is not a gift, it is an imposition. No man's sins are forgiven until he himself has by his own free act claimed and accepted forgiveness. There is always forgiveness in the heart of God, but forgiveness, from the very nature of the case, cannot be made effective until it is claimed and taken.

The two essential conditions for receiving and

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appropriating the divine forgiveness are faith and repentance. Faith, in this sense, means whole-hearted trust and confidence in the forgiving mercy of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Repentance consists of three things : Contrition, by which is meant a hearty sorrow for sin, since by it we have offended God, together with a firm purpose of amendment, a purpose which must especially include the willingness to forgive those who have offended us ; Confession, which means not only acknowledging our sinfulness in general terms, but telling out one by one the particular sinful acts we have committed ; Satisfaction, the determination to make such reparation as lies in our power to those whom we have injured by our sins. The fact that faith and repentance are the necessary conditions for receiving forgiveness is admitted by all Christians whether they be Catholic or Protestant. But for a Catholic, repentance for grievous sin entails confession in the sacramental sense, that is to say, confession to a priest ; and this is a subject about which very clear and plain teaching is necessary, for it is still clouded with a good deal of prejudice and misunderstanding.

III

What, then, is the precise value of sacramental confession ? Why should it not be just as good to confess our sins in our own private prayers without any priest coming between our souls and God ? The answer to that question is twofold :

In the first place, the outward sacramental act is

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a powerful aid to inward repentance. Those who talk about confessing their sins to God alone, do not always do it, and those who do it, do not always do it well. To go to confession means nerving oneself to an unpleasant task ; it means careful preparation ; it means an earnest effort at self-examination ; and therefore it directly increases the fervour and reality of repentance. Go into a Catholic church on a Saturday night or on the eve of a great Festival, when people are waiting to make their confessions, and you will learn more about the meaning of self-examination than all the sermons in the world could ever teach you. You will see old people and young children, well-dressed people and people in poor clothes, busy shop-keeping people, youths and girls kneeling about, serious and earnest, thinking about their souls, and doing their best to excite themselves to sorrow for their sins. It is a great lesson in reality.

The new psychology is here giving most powerful support to traditional Catholic practice. It teaches us that before a worried or disordered mind can be brought back to peace and harmony, its complexes—that is to say those repressed cravings, those unworthy motives, those mean acts, the remembrance of which we instinctively thrust into the hiddenness of the subconscious self and disguise or forget—must be brought to the surface, and, in the technical language of psychology, ‘abreacted’ ; in the language of religion, confessed. Psychologists are never tired of insisting on the danger of keeping skeletons in the cupboards of the mind, and on the importance

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of tracking down our sins, and of telling out to someone else the repressed secrets which are haunting us. Hence the growth of the practice of psycho-analysis. People will pay large fees for the privilege of confessing their sins to a psycho-analyst who would not dream of going to a priest, who would hear their confession for nothing, under conditions most carefully designed by the Church to guard the practice from abuse.

Secondly, and even more important, sacramental confession is the necessary condition for receiving sacramental absolution—i.e. the authoritative declaration of the Church given personally and individually to us that our sins are washed away in the precious Blood of Christ. The bestowal of forgiveness through an outward ministry is not something exceptional and extraordinary; on the contrary, it is in the strictest accordance with God's whole method of dealing with our souls. All his great gifts of grace are given to us in the Church sacramentally, so that, as we receive some outward visible thing, we know that bound up with it, and in a certain sense inseparable from it, is the inward spiritual gift. Thus we receive the gift of the new birth through the sacrament of Baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of Confirmation, and the gift of Eternal Life through the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. All these gifts are conveyed to us through our bodies, and through visible channels, as means whereby we receive the same, and pledges to assure us thereof.

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And the Church teaches that it is precisely the same with forgiveness—that here too a sacrament is the channel of the grace of God. Does it not seem reasonable that it should be so? Would it not be very extraordinary if God had provided a sacrament for all the other great needs of the soul, and not for this? If that were so the sinner would be treated in a wholly exceptional way; and, just at the very time when he was most in danger of self-deception, he would be left without any kind of certainty as to whether he were forgiven or not.

The objection is still sometimes raised that this is not the teaching of the English Church, but that position cannot possibly be maintained by anyone who takes the trouble to study the Book of Common Prayer. The Prayer Book teaches confession so plainly that he who runs may read. In the Ordination Service, where the bishop gives this solemn commission and authority to the priest he is ordaining: 'Whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.' At the beginning of Morning and Evening Prayer, where the priest is told to announce to his people that 'God hath given power and commandment to his ministers to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins.' In the exhortation before Communion, where he is directed to say that, if any man's conscience is so burdened that he is not able to quiet it, he is to come to him, or to some other discreet and learned minister of God's Word that

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he may open his grief, and receive the benefit of absolution. And in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick, where the priest is told to move the sick person to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, and then to absolve him, if he heartily and humbly desire it, in these solemn and authoritative words : ' Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners that truly repent and believe on him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences. And by his authority committed unto me, I absolve thee from all thy sins. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

Is there, then, any difference between the English Church and the Roman Church on this matter ? There is no difference whatever as to doctrine. But, unhappily, there is a difference of practice, owing to the slackness and irreligion of the dark days from which we are slowly emerging ; and there is a difference of discipline, since the English Church places the burden of responsibility upon the individual, making sacramental confession a matter of devotion rather than of obligation. In this, as in so many other matters, she allows her children a very wide liberty ; but she offers us all the gift of sacramental absolution, and we are wise if we avail ourselves of it, for if we neglect it it is to our most grievous loss. We may say, indeed, with Bishop Latimer, concerning the systematic teaching and use of confession, ' I would to God it were kept in England, for it is a good thing.'

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IV

There are a good many people in general sympathy with Catholic ideals and practices, to whom confession is still a great stumbling-block. They feel unhappy about their sins, and long for the comfort and joy of absolution, but they are held back from confession, either through early prejudice, or because they were never taught about it when they were young, or because they don't know how to set about it, or because they shrink from facing it, or perhaps, most of all, because they have never brought themselves to the point of decision. I would plead with any such folk whom these words may reach, to cross this Catholic Rubicon, not merely or chiefly for their own sakes, but for the sake of the whole Movement. The non-catholic world has been wise in singling out the Mass and the Confessional as the chief objects of its attack, for they are vital to the Catholic life; all else stands or falls with them. And there is little doubt that our chief weakness to-day lies in the existence in many of our Anglo-Catholic churches of numbers of communicants, sometimes even servers and church officials, who tacitly assume, and who are allowed to suppose, that they can be consistent Catholics without the irksome necessity of going to confession. Hence arises the disastrous impression that we are chiefly concerned with outward things, with bright services and attractive ceremonial and beautiful vestments. But rich clothing is a sorry substitute for personal

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cleanliness ; if a girl has a diamond necklace, it is the more necessary that she should wash her neck, since the necklace draws attention to it. It will be the ruin of the Catholic Movement if we allow ourselves to be mainly occupied with things external. A mere religion of 'pretty-pretty', however many the candles, and however scarlet the cassocks, and however deep the lace on the cottas, and however elaborate the processions, though it may attract for a time, will never permanently hold. Only if these outward things be the expression of vital inward religion shall we succeed in converting the world.

It is the religion of the Cross which, all unknowing, men's hearts are seeking ; the religion which speaks of pardon and peace, of sins forgiven, and grace bestowed, and strength made perfect in weakness. It is through the Sacrament of Penance that the Catholic associates himself openly and manifestly with the preaching of the Cross, and thus adds his testimony to the only Gospel that has a chance of winning back to Christ and his Church the hungry heart of the world.

THE GOSPEL THAT WILL WIN

‘Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God ; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments ; and took a towel . . . and began to wash the disciples’ feet.’

S. JOHN xiii. 3, 4, 5

I

AND some of us have been thinking that the Gospel is tame ! We have grown weary of its reiteration, impatient of the old, old story of the life and death of Jesus. We want something new, up to date, brilliant, revolutionary, exciting. ‘O fools and blind !’ Where are our eyes, that we cannot see what we need in Christ ? Where is our imagination, that we can listen calm and unmoved to a narrative like this, which is instinct with the spirit of revolution, which explodes in a sentence all human standards of value, which ought to thrill us through and through with the glorious excitement of the unexpected ? If I were giving you an account of the Coronation, and I told you that, on the morning after he was crowned, the King, knowing that he was now the head of the British Empire, took brushes and blacking, and began to clean his valet’s boots, you would refuse

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to take me seriously. Yet surely that would be a plain, matter-of-fact, ordinary occurrence compared with this wonderful event we are considering. 'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands,' chose from them all a towel, and began to wash his disciples' feet. Does it seem a strange anti-climax, an amazing contrast, a halting conclusion after a magnificent premise? It is a Gospel, a Gospel which for generations has been crowded out of Christian thought, and whose implications we are only slowly beginning to understand, and to appreciate anew, a Gospel which, if only it be simply and sincerely preached, will once again gain the allegiance of mankind. When Jesus, knowing that the Father had put all things into his hands, crowned the labours of those hands by bending them to so lowly and menial a task, he gave us a true idea of God, a true idea of life, and a true idea of service. These three things together constitute the Gospel of service. And the Gospel of service is the Gospel that will win mankind.

II

First of all, then, when Jesus took a towel and washed his disciples' feet, he gave us a true idea of God. The uniqueness of Christ's revelation lies, indeed, exactly in this : that it is the expression of the character of God in the terms not merely of human language, but of a human personality. The character of God was manifested to men not only

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in the words, but in the *life* of Jesus, and in no other conceivable form of manifestation could it have been so fully revealed.

'Ideas,' says George Eliot somewhere, 'are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in their vapour and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft, responsive hand, they look at us with sad, sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living, human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame.' That is exactly what the Son of God has done for us by his Incarnation. He expresses the idea of God in the eloquent and satisfying language of personality. We learn what God is like not by questioning the philosophers and theologians, and hair-splitting dogmatists, but by sitting at the feet of Jesus and realising that in his self-sacrificing love he is revealing to us the very Heart of God; that as he loves us, so God loves us; that as he suffers for us, so God suffers for us; that as he serves us, so God serves us.

Now, the point I want specially to emphasise is this: that the God revealed in the life of Jesus Christ is a very different Being from the God of popular theology. A book was published some time ago with the arresting title, *Do We Need a New Idea of*

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God? in which the writer tries to show that the root-cause of present-day religious indifference is the persistence in religious thought and teaching of a false conception of God's character. He points out that the language and thought-forms of our Church services, and of the majority of sermons that are being preached to-day, all breathe the atmosphere of courts and thrones. We think of God in the terms of autocracy rather than of democracy. We think of him either as a jealous tyrant demanding our unfaltering obedience on pain of everlasting punishment, or as a benevolent despot too gracious and benign to be unkind, but always as an absolute, irresponsible ruler, isolated from his creation, and reigning on a throne in a distant heaven. And the writer goes on to say that the most stupendous and urgent problem for modern theology and religion centres in the one question, 'Can the thought of God be anyhow re-shaped in the terms of modern democratic outreach, and in such a manner as to serve as an inspiration for democracy? Is the conception of a democratic God anyhow possible? And, if so, what sort of God will it be that such a conception will give us?'

Now, there is no doubt whatever that in asking this question the writer is expressing a feeling that is both widespread and rapidly growing in intensity. And the fact that it is possible for so many serious and thoughtful people so grossly to misunderstand the Gospel message ought to make us ask ourselves how far we have been faithfully presenting it to the

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world. For the democratic idea of God, so far from being new, is as old as the New Testament ; the only God who can serve as an inspiration for democracy is the God revealed in Jesus Christ. There is no more democratic book in the world than that which shows us the Ruler of the Universe clad in the rough dress of a peasant. There is no more democratic Gospel conceivable than that which calls us to the worship of a God who was born in a stable and cradled in a manger, who laboured in the workshop of a village carpenter, and stooped to perform the menial duties of a slave. There is no more democratic incident in all history than that which shows the King of kings and Lord of lords girding himself with a towel, and washing his disciples' feet. For the noblest conception of democracy is that which interprets it not merely as government by all, but as service by all. And democracy finds its supreme consecration in a religion which bids us serve a God who is himself a servant, who when he walked this earth of ours was clad not in ermine, but in fustian, and who proudly wore the badge and livery of service.

Yes, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is pre-eminently the glory of service. 'I am among you,' he said, 'as he that serveth.' And again, 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' This feature of our Lord's life is stamped upon it from his childhood. As a boy of twelve he went down with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth and 'was subject unto them.' We can

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picture him as a little lad always willingly at his mother's beck and call, helping her to fill her water-pitchers at the well, or doing anything else which might relieve her. We can see him as a young man working in the carpenter's shop with his foster-father, S. Joseph, as Holman Hunt represents him in his famous picture 'The Shadow of the Cross,' surrounded by the implements of his trade, and stretching himself wearily after bending over the carpenter's bench. When he entered on his ministry, the whole of his later life was marked with the same note of humble service. And in the incident we are specially considering—surely the most perfect incident of a perfect life—he exhibited the character of God in an acted parable that everyone can understand ; he served his disciples in the literal, menial way of an oriental slave. ' Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God ; took a towel and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.' What a spectacle, this picture of one who is the image of the invisible God, demeaning himself as though he were the least and the lowest of his creatures, washing one by one the feet of his wondering disciples ; washing, among the rest, the feet of Judas ! And now let the toiling masses choose a creed from all the creeds and a god from all the religions of the world, weighing carefully the claims of all the gods of unapproachable majesty and unalterable power. They will not find another

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Deity who has worked as a manual labourer. They will find only one God who took upon himself the form of a servant, and thought it no scorn to wash the feet of a traitor.

III

‘Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God; took a towel and began to wash the disciples’ feet.’ If these words give us a true idea of God, they give us also a true idea of human life. They teach us that we, like the God we worship, must devote ourselves to service. The importance of having a true conception of the character of God lies, indeed, exactly in this: that we tend to become like the God we worship. Our God is our ideal. If, for instance, we think that God is cruel, we are likely to become cruel ourselves, as witness all the fires of religious persecution. If we think that God exercises arbitrary and despotic power, we shall come to believe with the militarists that might is right. If we believe that God lives a life of selfish ease, secure from all toil and sorrow in a heaven beyond the skies, we shall assuredly hold that the great aim of life is to secure our own personal happiness and salvation for eternity. But if we believe that God is himself the servant of humanity, that he is the God of the struggle, the eternal toiler, that even in the central sanctuary of the universe the great law of democracy holds good, ‘from each according to his ability,’ why, then, we

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cannot but believe that for us, too, service is the true ideal of life ; we shall understand all that its toil and sweat and effort really mean in the working out of God's eternal purpose.

It is in the call to service that there lies, as I am profoundly persuaded, the only religious appeal that will ever win the modern world for Christ. The old appeal to men to save their souls from a threatening doom beyond the grave has rightly lost whatever power it had. The fact that it was so distinctly an appeal to a man's own self-interest and selfish impulses has killed it. Its ethic, in fact, is one which men who have caught the larger social spirit of the age have come to hold in utter contempt. They may not always live up to higher standards, but they do expect religion to appeal to what is noblest and best in them ; and, in their heart of hearts, they know that the selfish standard that prompts a man to consider only his own interest is beneath them and unworthy of them. It is not simply because they are indifferent to high and noble ideals that so many intelligent and thoughtful men and women are holding aloof from the Churches to-day. It is because they feel that the idea of God and the idea of life which the Churches commonly present are ideas lower than their own higher vision. In the light of a growing collective consciousness, they can no longer think of individual happiness and salvation whether in this life or in the next as the be-all and end-all of religion and of their own being. Surely, it is a thing beneath contempt that

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Christians, followers of a Master who took a towel and washed his disciples' feet, and then took a cross and gave his life for them and for us all, should still be centring their minds on the petty and miserable business of saving their own souls. Let us cease thinking of the Church as an ark of salvation wherein we may take refuge from a catastrophe that will one day plunge the rest of mankind in ruin. Let us think of it rather as a divine registry office wherein we may take service in the noblest of all tasks, that of establishing here on earth the Kingdom of God. What does our church-going mean? Why do we come to receive the Holy Communion? Why do we pray? Is it simply that we may save our own souls, and obtain comfort and help for our own spiritual needs? Or is it that we may be fitted, strengthened, trained, inspired for service? Do we realise what our Christian profession really means that it is a call to effort, a summons to labour, a challenge to heroic service in all the mighty tasks of the age in which we live? Do we understand that the God revealed in Christ is not the monarch of a distant court and throne, living in selfish idleness, waiting to be pleased and placated, but that he is himself in the struggle, and that he needs *us*, our effort, our strength, our will, our life, to help him lay the foundations of the new and better world that is to be?

‘Jesus took a towel and washed his disciples’ feet, and said to them, If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s

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feet. For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you.' When once we obey him, when we dedicate our lives to the service of God and of humanity, when we think not of what we can get from God, but of what we can give to him, then our service in church will be service in reality and truth, the consecration to God of the labour of our daily lives ; then we shall enter into the real joy and splendour of religion, and on our opened eyes will burst the radiant vision of the King in his beauty :

It were not hard, we think, to serve him
If we could only see,
If he could stand with that gaze intense
Burning into our bodily sense ;
If we might look on that Face most tender,
The brow where the scars are turned to splendour,
Might catch the light of his smile so sweet,
And view the marks on his Hands and Feet,
How loyal we should be.
It were not hard, we think, to serve him,
If we could only see.

It were not hard, he says, to see him
If we would only serve.
He that doeth the will of Heaven
To him shall knowledge and sight be given.
While for his presence we sit repining
Never we see his countenance shining ;
They who toil where his reapers be,
The glow of his smile may always see,
And their faith shall never swerve.
It were not hard, he says, to see him,
If we would only serve.

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IV

Yes, but how can we serve? What can we do? How can we be fellow-workers with God in the great struggle of the universe towards higher and nobler life? Well, what did Jesus do? He took a cross, you say, and died for mankind. Yes, that is true. But he did something else as well; he took a towel and washed his disciples' feet. And, as I have already said, this incident gives us not only a true idea of God and a true idea of life, but a true idea of service; it teaches us that we may find opportunities for serving God in the humblest duties of daily life. True religion recognises no bisection into secular and sacred; our ordinary everyday work, if it be done with a religious motive, if we do it because we come from God and go to God, is religious work. Surely it was to help us to realise this, to enable us to find a true and living link between our ordinary common duties and the fact of God and of his Christ, that our Saviour took a towel and washed the disciples' feet.

He took a towel. How inspiring and encouraging it is to us that his humble act of service is recorded of our Master. If it were only written of him that he took a cross, we might despair of following in his footsteps. We have not, most of us, the opportunity for doing great things in the service of humanity; and if we had the opportunity, it may be we should lack the spirit and the courage. But if we cannot do great things, at any rate we can do

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small ones ; if we cannot be heroic, we can be faithful ; if we cannot take a cross, at least we can take a towel. However humble your lot in life, however restricted your opportunities, however commonplace your tasks, there is always something you can do for God. There is a towel always ready to your hand, a word that you can speak for Christ, a cup of cold water you can give in his Name, a hand that you can stretch out to lift the burden from a brother's weary back. Towels are needed just as much as crosses in this world of ours, for there are so many weary travellers with aching, dust-stained feet, and so many lowly, humdrum, monotonous tasks that are as necessary to the world's welfare as the heroic exploits of the great leaders of mankind.

Jesus offers *you* a towel ; will you not take it ? He calls you to consecrate your daily life to service. He tells you that there is some little bit of commonplace, ordinary work that you can do for your Church, for your neighbourhood, for your city, for your country, for the spread of his Kingdom through the world. Don't despise it because it is only a towel. Take it with the same mighty consciousness of a Divine motive that inspired Jesus ; take it because you come from God and go to God, and you will surely find that that motive will make even the drudgery of your life beautiful.

DAYBREAK

‘As it began to dawn.’

S. MATTHEW xxvii. 1

I

SO ended the awful night of the Passion and the Death of Jesus; so dawned the fairest morning in the world’s history—the morning of his Resurrection. The sun which had hidden its face for very shame when Christ died upon the Cross, now burst forth in transfiguring splendour on a new world. It began to dawn.

Literally, of course, the words simply mark a point of time; they tell us that Christ rose from the grave very early in the morning. But the point of time is itself significant; it speaks to us of the unwearying activity of the love of Jesus. His redemptive work was finished when he died upon the Cross, and he fell asleep and rested for a while from his labours. He slept, but he would not oversleep. He was up with the dawn on Easter morning, that he might begin his new work for a ransomed world.

‘As it began to dawn.’ The point of time speaks to us, too, of the tender thoughtfulness of Jesus. He knew that the hearts that loved him were breaking. The soul can only hold on for a certain time:

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'If that letter does not come by the next post, if I do not get better news before night, I shall give up hope.' Even the Blessed Mother, with all her wonderful faith in her Son's personality and purpose, must have been on the point of breaking down. But Jesus will not keep her waiting a moment longer than he must. On the third day, as soon as it could really be called day, as it began to dawn, he rose.

It began to dawn. The words have a mystical as well as a literal meaning. They gather up and express in a poetic symbol all that Easter meant to Mary, all that it meant to the disciples, all that it means to us. The Resurrection of Jesus was in very truth the daybreak, pouring light upon a shadowed world; like the dawn of day, it changed the aspect of everything. I remember once standing high up on an Alpine pass very early in the morning. Everything was bleak, cold, and cheerless. The great rocks behind me were wrapped in gloom; the mountain-tops above were grim and sombre, with the clouds of night still upon them; the little mountain stream shivered in the cold air of the dawn. Then suddenly the sun rose, and in a moment everything was transfigured. The sunshine glittered on the rocks, transforming them into gleaming blocks of gold; the clouds became a tapestry of splendour fringed with pink and yellow tassels; the stream laughed and chattered gaily as it leapt up to kiss the dawn; the mountains grew all rosy with blushes as they trembled in the embrace of the sun. So when on Easter morning the Sun of Righteousness arose

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with healing in his wings, he scattered in a moment the gloomy shades of doubt and sorrow, putting to flight the Prince of Darkness, re-animating faith, hope, and love within the human heart.

II

‘As it began to dawn.’ Thus mystically interpreted, our text proclaims to us, first of all, the triumph of joy over sorrow. Night is the symbol of sorrow, of the hiding of God’s face from us, as some great sorrow casts its dark shadow on the soul. And as for those who love the Lord Jesus Christ even a little there is no sorrow like that of Good Friday, there is no joy like that of Easter Day. It is the purest and best joy that a Christian can ever feel, because in its essence it is unselfish joy—joy at the personal triumph of Christ. It is Christ’s rising, *his* dawn, *his* day of vindication, that is our first thought at Easter. He comes to meet us in our Easter Communion, as a returning Conqueror, bursting forth from the tomb, treading his enemies beneath his feet. Just because we love Christ, our hearts are simply carried away by his overwhelming triumph, a triumph which is intensified a thousand-fold because it follows so quickly on seemingly overwhelming defeat. Good Friday and Easter Day, the darkness and the dawn, belong to each other. We could not bear the Friday unless we knew that the Sunday was coming. And, on the other hand,

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our Easter joy would not be nearly so exquisite were it not for its historic background of tears and shame and humiliation. The foes of Christ congratulated themselves with such intense satisfaction on the Friday. They nailed his hands, and they nailed his feet; they spat upon him, and smote him in the face, and jeered at him, and gloated over his sufferings as he hung there in his dying agony. 'We can go home now,' they cried; 'we have won at last. He is dying as we would have him die, in anguish and disgrace. His friends have all forsaken him and fled; his claims are wrecked for ever. We have shown what happens to those who oppose us. We have crushed this heresy into fragments, and scattered it to the winds.' Well, their triumph was short-lived indeed. On the third day, as it began to dawn, with a burst of unimaginable glory, framed in the golden light of the rising sun, Christ rose from the dead. It is all over now. Death's mightiest powers have done their very worst, and in the moment of their seeming victory have tasted the bitterness of a complete, a humiliating, an overwhelming defeat. Nay! they are not only defeated, they are annihilated. 'For the Lord our God has awaked out of sleep like a giant refreshed with wine. He has smitten his enemies in the hinder parts and put them to a perpetual shame. He has broken the gates of brass, and smitten the bars of iron in sunder.' This is what makes the joy of Easter different from any other joy in the whole wide world; it is so magnificently triumphant. It is the Lord's Day, when

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Jesus, the despised and rejected of men, comes at last into his own. God forbid that our Easter rejoicing should be a mere selfish emotion, that we should think only or even mainly of ourselves. We will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, and, like Arthur's knights of old, salute with a song of welcoming love the return of our Conquering King :

Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May,
Blow trumpet, the long night hath rolled away,
Blow through the living world ; Let the King reign !
Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May :
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day-by-day ;
Clang battle-axe, and clash brand ! Let the King reign !

Yes, it is because Christ is triumphant, because with his own right hand and with his holy arm he hath gotten to himself the victory : that is why we are glad at Easter. ' He is risen, even as he said.' The words of the Angel at the empty tomb are caught up and repeated by millions of Christians all over the world. He is risen ! He is risen ! The organ thunders them, the lilies on the altar whisper them, the trees bursting into new leaf re-echo them. They make Easter the greatest of all days in the whole Christian year ; they make us one and all impatient of sermons, and eager only to join together in worship, to shout the grand old Easter hymns with their triumphant Alleluias. And with adoring love and thankfulness we hasten to remove the cruel crown of thorns from the sacred brow of

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our triumphant Saviour, and, bringing forth the royal diadem, to crown him Lord of all.

III

‘As it began to dawn.’ They are fit words wherewith to usher in the Easter story, because they symbolise not only the triumph of joy over sorrow, but the triumph of good over evil. Night is the symbol of sin even more than of sorrow. ‘This is your hour,’ said our Lord when he was arrested, ‘and the power of darkness.’ In the great battle that was fought out on Calvary between the Light of the World and the Prince of Darkness, it seemed for the moment that Satan was completely triumphant, and that evil was the dominant power in the world. When Christ was crucified it must have seemed as if day would never break again, as if the Sun of God’s Righteousness had gone down for ever, in a sea of innocent blood. ‘While all the vices were being crowned and feasted at Rome, all the virtues were crucified with impunity at Jerusalem.’ And the hour of Satan and the power of darkness proclaimed with no uncertain voice that men lived in a world where nothing was more surely at a discount than moral beauty, and nothing more certain of the future than physical and brute force.

That was the boast of the wicked, and in other cases it has seemed, except to the eye of faith, to be only too true a boast. But in Jesus Christ the boast

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was made in all its insolence, only to be put to shame. The seeming triumph of evil lasted for three short days, and then . . . it began to dawn. The Angel of the Lord came and rolled away the stone from the door of the Sepulchre, and, sitting on it in holy contempt, proclaimed that righteousness had triumphed, that the real law which rules the world is moral and not material law, and that in the long run spirit is always stronger than force. The greatest proof that was ever given that the world is ruled by a righteous God was given when Jesus, the sinless Victim of triumphant evil, was rescued by the Resurrection from the clutches of death.

We need that assurance to-day, as much as it was ever needed, for pessimism is beyond question one of the most striking characteristics of the thought of our time. To the modern mind, still suffering from the shell-shock of the war, life commonly presents itself as a tragedy, moving through a wilderness of sorrow to calamity and darkness. A wave of hopelessness has engulfed society; we see its traces everywhere. Our philosophers tell us that the idea of progress is an exploded fallacy; that the only difference between the wild man of the woods and the man of to-day is that he has lost his claws, and become more efficient in the use of tools, and that the centuries have witnessed no real improvement in human nature. Our prophets predict the break-up of our social order in a revolution, and of our civilisation in a war compared with which the last will prove to have been child's play. Our artists

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paint ugly pictures because they feel that it is the province of art to express reality, and they can see nothing but ugliness in the world around them. It is the same with our literature. The dominant note struck in the novels and plays of our time is the note of pessimism. The impression they leave on us is that life is very bad and not much likely to be better, and that man is doomed to disappointment and futility. They end, as a rule, like the Forsyte Saga, with the discordant syncopation of a swan-song. The belief that existence, for all its effort, is but tragedy; that the world is hurrying forward to the dark; that the wheel is coming full circle, and that civilisation is destined to collapse—this thought is subtly but steadily finding its way into the hearts of people everywhere.

A similar pessimistic tendency can be discerned in the religious thought of our time. To many people the outlook for English religion seems so hopeless that they are tempted to give up in despair. The scornful challenge of unbelief outside the Church; the unrebuked denial of fundamental truths of the Creed by teachers in high position within it; the growing neglect of public worship in all classes of society; the tragic spectacle of a Church divided against itself, and seeking public humiliation by pleading in vain for a settlement of its controversies at the bar of a nation which is becoming increasingly contemptuous not only of the doctrinal but of the moral standards of the Christian Faith; the tragedy of an official policy,

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extracting from the present nothing but its bitterness, and from the past nothing but its mistakes, blundering on in ruinous precedents, alienating men of goodwill in every party, and rocking helplessly like an anchored boat which does but show the rapidity of the current which is rushing past it—these are discouragements to tax the faith and endurance of the bravest soul. For us Catholics, in particular, the night seems endless. After a hundred years of the Catholic Revival we are still an unpopular minority, faced with a renewed and determined effort to make our position impossible within the English Church. We are accused of being disloyal, disobedient, obstinate, fanatical, unintelligent. We are told that the educated world has forsaken us, that science has destroyed the foundations of our most cherished beliefs, that our worship is an ignorant superstition, and our methods of prayer an offence to the God of Truth. What wonder if we are tempted to think at times that we are sailing in a sinking ship, and that, to change the metaphor, the Catholic Revival in the English Church is destined to perish in the wilderness, soon to lie buried and forgotten beneath the drifting sands of a non-miraculous and non-sacramental substitute for Christianity.

It is for hours of doubt and darkness such as this that Easter provides such a glorious message of encouragement. We remember the darkness of utter despair that gathered round the Cross of a dead Christ, and we remember the Easter dawn

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that followed it. To the man who believes in the resurrection of Christ, despair can never be a permanent condition. As has been well said, short pessimism may sometimes be pardoned to a Christian—that is, he may question whether some particular fragment of Christian activity is likely to be successful in a short space of time. For we are like weavers, working with only the underside of the web visible, and

We may not see how the right side looks ;
We can only weave and wait.

But long pessimism—hopelessness regarding the final issues—is not permissible. It is impossible to believe in the Resurrection and to believe at the same time that the spirit of this world will in the long run conquer the spirit of Christ. We know as we stand before his empty tomb that right is might, that to be on the side of good is to be on the winning side, and that evil can in the long run secure nothing but its own destruction. Nothing can ever happen worse than what happened on Good Friday ; and even after Good Friday it began to dawn. The Resurrection of Jesus is the living proof that somehow and some day good shall triumph over evil. It quivers like the morning star in the canopy of the world's night of sin and sorrow, proclaiming the dawn of the day that is to be, when the whole world shall be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. Be it ours in the light of the Easter revelation to do our part and lend our

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help in the slow fulfilment of the divine purpose, not despairing because of the way, but stepping fearlessly through the night, well assured that

Out of the darkness of night
The world rolls into light,
It is daybreak everywhere.

IV

Yes, everywhere, even in the Grave. The Easter dawn marks the triumph of life over death ; that is the complete and final triumph of which the victory of joy over sorrow, and of good over evil, are but partial manifestations. The Resurrection of Christ was the morning that came upon the death-land. Since Christ is risen, death is a conquered foe ; his sting is drawn ; and as for the victory of the grave, it is but a hollow shout ; it has lost whatever it had of terrific threat and thunder. ' For now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'

So, as we keep the Feast of our Risen and Living Lord, let us lay firm hold of the great and mighty Gospel of Life victorious over Death. We think to-day not only of an empty tomb, but of empty tombs, millions of them : ay ! and of empty waves, for the sea *has* given up its dead. The old, old question, If a man die, shall he live again ? is

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answered to-day by the triumphant Yes of Christendom. The Angel of the Resurrection stands in the graves of our own dear ones, and says to us : 'Why seek ye the living among the dead ? They are not here ; they are risen.' That which happened to Christ without corruption has happened to them through corruption. All that is in their graves is the worn-out vesture of the flesh, which they have discarded because they need it no longer. But they are not there ; they are not asleep, but fully, consciously, personally alive.

Let us, then, banish all fear of death, both for ourselves and for those we love. The Risen Jesus has given us a word that dries our tears, and robs death of its terrors. That word is Morning. He has shown us that the Valley of the Shadow opens out towards the sunrise. And in the light of the Easter revelation we may think of death no longer with fear and apprehension, but in words like those of the poet, all resonant with the ringing confidence of immortality :

Life, we've been long together
Through sunshine and through stormy weather,
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,
Perchance 'twill cost a sigh or tear ;
Then steal away, give little warning,
Choose thine own time.
Say not, Good night ! but in some brighter clime
Bid me Good morning !

THE JOY OF THE ASCENSION

‘ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.’

S. LUKE xxiv. 50-2

I

THE ceremonies of Catholic worship have a great educational value; they teach through the eye, as the sermon teaches through the ear. The Paschal Candle is a case in point, symbolising as it does the sojourn of the Light of the World with his disciples during the great Forty Days. Blessed on Holy Saturday, and lighted at all the principal services during the Easter Season, it is put out after the Gospel on Ascension Day, and removed at the end of Mass, as a token of the Saviour’s withdrawal from the sight of men, and a reminder that we must henceforth walk by faith and not by sight. ‘ Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.’

The story of the Ascension is given three times in the New Testament; very briefly in the concluding sentences of S. Luke’s Gospel, with more

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detail in the first chapter of the Acts, and at the end of the Gospel of S. Mark in a passage which does not form part of the original text, but which was added probably at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, and thus forms a powerful testimony to the belief of the Primitive Church. But it would be a mistake to suppose that our belief in the Ascension rests only on a two-fold mention by S. Luke (who, so far as we know, was not an eye-witness of it) and an anonymous paragraph appended to the second Gospel. It occupies an important place in the apostolic testimony, both as the natural consequence of the Resurrection, and as the only sufficient cause of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Apostles always speak of Christ as One who has passed into the highest Heaven ; they think of him not as risen only, but as ascended also. It was from Heaven that Christ appeared to S. Paul on the Damascus road. S. Stephen sees the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. S. Peter speaks of Christ as having gone into Heaven, and of the Angels and Powers being made subject unto him. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that Christ is crowned with glory and honour, and that he has entered as our great High Priest into the Holy of Holies, to make intercession for us. S. John, in his vision of the splendours of the New Jerusalem, sees as its chiefest glory One like unto the Son of Man whose eyes were as a flame of fire, and his voice

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as the sound of many waters, and his countenance as the sun shining in his strength. The more closely we study the teaching of the Apostles, the more clearly we shall perceive that the Ascension was for them no ideal or imaginary apotheosis, but a real, actual passing of the risen Saviour out of the region of the seen and natural into the region of the unseen and supernatural.

II

‘And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.’ With great joy. Let us isolate these three words, and try to fix our undivided attention on them. At first reading, they may well strike us as strange. Why should the disciples have rejoiced at the loss of the visible presence of their Master? When he had told them just before his Passion that in a little while they would see him no more, they had been overwhelmed with sorrow. ‘Because I have said these things unto you sorrow has filled your hearts.’ And, indeed, when we consider how much Christ meant to them, how they treasured his companionship, how they leant on his help and sympathy, how they depended on his guidance and inspiration; when we remember they had lost him for a while on Good Friday, and had since experienced the joy of reunion with him; when we recollect further that he had left them a

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great commission, no less than to preach his Gospel to the whole world, a task which must have seemed so infinitely beyond the power of humble, uneducated peasants such as they were—it seems difficult to understand how, after his disappearance, they could return to Jerusalem with great joy. You may have had a very dear friend, whose character you very greatly admired, on whom you depended in all kinds of ways, for advice, for sympathy, for help. And then, quite suddenly, he had to go and live hundreds of miles away. You kept a brave face and a smile while you were saying good-bye to him, but when the train had steamed out of the station or the ship had left the wharf, you gave way to your grief, and felt in your soul that life could never be quite the same again. Yet it was not so with the disciples. Christ had meant all that to them, and a thousand times more than that ; but after he had disappeared from their sight, instead of breaking down and giving themselves up to despair, their hearts were filled with joy. What is the explanation of it ?

Clearly, in its essence it was an unselfish joy ; they rejoiced at the personal triumph of their Lord. Their eyes could no longer see him, but their imagination could pierce through the veil that hid him from their bodily sight, and behold him sweeping along on his path of victory, past legions of adoring Angels, until at last he reached the topmost pinnacle of the universe, and took his seat at the right hand of God. For the moment, we may be sure, they forgot all about themselves. Their

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first thoughts were for their Master—vindicated, glorious, triumphant.

So it should be with us on Ascension Day. One of the chief purposes of the Festivals is to make us forget ourselves, our troubles, our needs, and get rid of selfish, personal preoccupations by dwelling on the majesty and splendour of God. Where the great Feasts are ignored or passed over, this primary aspect of worship is forgotten, and religion inevitably becomes subjective. Compare, for instance, the hymns for Ascensiontide with emotional mission hymns: 'Hail the day that sees him rise,' with 'Weary of earth and laden with my sin.' Or, 'All hail the power of Jesu's Name' with 'Rock of Ages.' No doubt mission hymns have their value, but there is no question which type of hymn ought to be more prominent in worship. Self-absorption is always an ugly thing, but it is peculiarly unattractive when it is associated with religion. On Ascension Day, as on Easter Day, the first great note in our anthem of joy is the glory and triumph of Jesus. We have seen him despised and rejected of men, outcast, homeless, bowed down with our infirmities, mocked, derided, spat upon, scourged, rejected, crucified. And now, after the sorrow comes the joy; after the cries of blasphemy, the adoration of the Angels; after the reed and the crown of thorns, the sceptre of righteousness and the diadem of universal dominion. We rejoice because Christ has come into his own; we try to think of the triumph that awaited him, the welcome

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of the Heavenly Host to their returning Lord, until we fancy we can hear the rich burst of the angelic anthem as he sits down in glory on the Throne of Heaven : ' Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors ; and the King of Glory shall come in.' Here, then, is the first reason for Ascension joy. We are glad because ' God hath highly exalted Jesus Christ our Saviour, and given him a Name that is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things on the earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

III

But if the disciples rejoiced for Christ's sake, they rejoiced for their own sake too. ' It is expedient for you that I go away,' he had said to them when they were grieving at the anticipation of his departure. And he told them why : ' I will not leave you comfortless ; I will come to you.' The Ascension was the pledge of the Saviour's perpetual presence ; it did not take him away from them, it brought him closer than ever before. ' Lo !' he promised, ' I am with you all the days, even to the end of the world.' He bade farewell to a few, that he might be present throughout the ages wherever two or three are gathered together in his Name.

Here we reach the true significance of the Feast

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of the Ascension, and, with it, the very heart and core of the Gospel. The childish notion that Christ ascended through the sky, up and up above the most distant star, has probably done more harm to the cause of true religion than most of the other heresies put together. It has tended to destroy the whole meaning and purpose of the Incarnation by separating God from his world. Scientifically, of course, it will not stand a moment's reflection. It was well enough when men thought that this earth was the centre of the universe, a flat, stationary surface, suspended in space, and that above the solid, blue dome of the sky was Heaven and the Throne of God. We know now that there is neither up nor down in this visible universe, and that, if we ourselves were transported to the moon, we should see the earth suspended in the blue azure over our heads. Certainly religious art has made us familiar with the idea of a gradually ascending Figure, watched by the upturned faces of the disciples, till it is lost in the distant blue. And our hymns sing of the Friend for little children above the bright blue sky, and of Christ going up to mansions in the skies, and so on. But we are quite as close even to the literal language of the New Testament, and certainly far more in accord with the Catholic doctrine of the Church and the Sacraments, if we think of the cloud that received the Lord out of the sight of his disciples as a cloud *on* the mountain and not *above* it, a mountain mist shrouding the form of the beloved Master as he vanishes from the sight of

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his faithful followers. Just as in the Ascension Day Collect we pray that we may in heart and mind ascend into the heavens and continually dwell with Christ, so we may rightly and in the most orthodox fashion conceive of the Ascension of our Lord as a going up, not from the earth to the sky, but from a lower plane of being to a higher.

Orthodox divines used to speculate how far the Throne of God was from the earth, and it was the generally accepted notion that it was at least as far away as the Pleiades. This would mean that, travelling continuously at the speed of the swiftest aeroplane, it would take a hundred million years to reach that particular spot in space. But we know that Heaven is here at our very doors. We cannot see our blessed Saviour, but we believe that he dwells among us in the Most Holy Sacrament, hidden from our sight by the lowly veils of the Sacramental Species, but closer than breathing and nearer than hands and feet. The living and abiding presence of Jesus is the great central, living experience of the Catholic Church, and it is this experience which makes it so pre-eminently a religion of joy. The joy of the disciples as they returned to Jerusalem was the firstfruits of that gladness of soul which has always been a fundamental mark of the true religion of Christ. We do not think of him as dwelling above the bright blue sky, but as exalted into the heavenly places into which we too can ascend by lifting up our hearts. If our eyes were open we might see him, not far away, but very close at hand. We

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might see him on the altar, as S. John saw him, walking up and down amidst the candlesticks. We might see him as S. Stephen saw him, standing by us in our trouble because he is standing on the right hand of God ; we might see him as S. Paul saw him in that blinding flash of glory which changed him from persecutor to apostle ; we might see him as Francis Thompson saw him, as he walked in his rags along the Thames Embankment.

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air,
That we ask of the stars in motion,
If they have rumour of Thee there ?

Not where the wheeling systems darken
And our benumbed conceiving soars—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places,
Turn but a stone and start a wing,
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry ! and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder,
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry !—clinging Heaven by the hems ;
And lo ! Christ, walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames.

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IV

We pass on to consider one further reason for Ascension joy. In the fourteenth chapter of S. John there is another promise with which our Saviour comforted his disciples when they were sorrowing at the anticipation of his departure. 'I go to prepare a place for you,' he said, 'and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there may ye be also'. That filled the hearts of the disciples with joy; it comforted them as they thought of the future. The world beyond the tomb could be no longer dark, dreary, and unknown, for Christ, their best Friend, had gone on ahead to make all things ready for them, and when they arrived at its gates they would find him waiting to welcome them. The Ascension is a source of joy to us for the same reason. Just because, in the light of modern thought, we think of Heaven rather as an exalted condition of spiritual life which may be lived anywhere, than as confined to a particular locality, the thought of future bliss is apt to become vague and shadowy to us. The remedy for this is to think of Heaven as being with Christ. He is truly God, but he is also truly man, and because he has ascended, One who shares our human nature has passed into that new condition of being, and has promised that he will there prepare a place for us. Phillips Brooks, in one of his sermons, illustrates this idea with a vivid and beautiful parable. 'If, on some

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hitherto unexplored and uninhabited island, far away in the coral seas, a man goes to live, whoever he may be, the poorest and least interesting of our race, he clothes that island with intelligibleness. I can understand and realise its existence, when I know that a human foot has been pressed upon its sandy beach. If he is a great strong man who goes there, carrying with him a large share of our humanity, then he gives the island more than intelligibleness. He gives it dignity and interest. But if the man who goes there is my friend, and if before he goes he tells me that he is going to make a home there for me, and prepare it for my coming, and that he will come back again and take me to it by and by, then how that island burns for me, the one, live, real, shining spot in all the world. I think of it until the familiar house where I am living now seems strange compared with that one shining spot that has become so real. My friend's love makes it all glow and burn before me, as if I myself already saw the sun shining on its mountain-tops, and flashing on the surface of its streams.'

That is what the Ascension does for us. It makes us feel that Heaven is real because Christ's humanity is there, glorious because his greatness is there, and dear because his love is there, that love which filled his earthly life, the love of the miracle, and of the wayside teaching, and of the Cross. With the faith of the Ascension in our hearts, we can never be troubled as we think of death, for we know that on its other side there is a home prepared for us, where

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friend will meet with friend, where the many mansions will extend their ample hospitality to people of every kindred, race, and tongue, and where above all, we shall sit at the feet of Jesus and be satisfied. There are glories there which human language can only try to express in the symbols of golden streets, and jewelled foundations, and pearly gates, and sapphire thrones. There are rivers clear as crystal, and trees rich in foliage, and flowers full of bloom. It is written of the Saints that they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, and that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. But their chief joy and glory is the Beatific Vision : ‘ His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his Face.’ Content may we be to go with courage and hope to the grave, since it is lit for us with this shining torch of love : ‘ I go to prepare a place for you ; and I will come again and take you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.’

WITNESSING WITH POWER

‘Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost
is come upon you : and ye shall be my witnesses.’

Acts i. 8

I

IT is the parting utterance of the ascending Saviour ; his last command spoken as he stands with his feet upon the steps of the Heavenly Throne. As throughout his earthly ministry, so now, almost from the place of bliss itself, he impresses upon his Apostles the nature of their great vocation. They were to be organisers of the Church, ministers of the Sacraments, pastors of souls, fishers of men ; but their paramount duty was to be witnesses. ‘Ye shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.’

And in the same breath in which our Lord laid on them this great command he promised them the power necessary to fulfil it. Theirs was a task for which they might have seemed already well enough equipped. They had been with Christ throughout his ministry, they had seen his miracles, they had heard his public teaching, they had been taught by

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him in private, they had seen him in his Passion and Death and Resurrection, they were about to witness his Ascension. But he tells them that all this was not enough. As his own ministry had been effectual through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, so it was to be with theirs. 'Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses.'

It was on the first Whit-Sunday that the power was given, and the command obeyed. When the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, when suddenly the building trembled with the sound of a rushing, mighty wind, and there spread out upon them and around them from one centre a seraphic shower, tongues of fire like a vast halo of glory, and sat upon each of them. And, filled with the same Spirit of power which had dwelt in the Manhood of Jesus, the Apostles went forth to obey his last command, and to bear him a witness which was to end only with death.

The duty of witnessing to Jesus is laid on every one of us; no Christian may claim exemption from it. We all of us in one way or another are called to bear our witness. For Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and to each one of us, according to our several positions and opportunities, there comes ringing down the ages his last and greatest charge, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto me.'

As the command is given us, so also is the power to obey it. The same Holy Spirit which was in Jesus Christ, and which was poured out on the

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Apostles at Pentecost, was given to us at our Confirmation, and for the same purpose. He who dwells within us is the Spirit of Truth, illuminating our minds, but more than that. He is the Spirit of Strength, invigorating our wills, but more than that. He is the Spirit of Love, inflaming our affections, but more than that. He is the Spirit of Holiness, transforming us into the likeness of Christ, but more even than that. He is the Spirit of Power, enabling us to fulfil our Saviour's last command, and to bear him faithful witness in the world.

II

What, then, is this power for witness which the Holy Ghost gives to us ? It will help us to answer that question if we consider what we really need in order that we may bear a true witness to Jesus Christ.

First of all, we need conviction, for conviction is the one and only thing that will really convince. What is conviction ? The word has been so long current coin in the kingdom of cant that it has become counterfeit in the kingdom of truth. With many people conviction is only a fine name for inclination, or opinion, or prejudice, or bigotry. But true conviction is none of these things. It may be defined as knowledge born of experience. When belief is wedded to experience, then, and not till then, is conviction born. For instance, a man may have been taught all about the sacramental principle,

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and thoroughly understand the Church's teaching about repentance, and yet fail entirely to appreciate the necessity or the value of confession. But once let these things be translated into the language of his own personal experience ; once let him feel the burden of sin, and know the certainty of forgiveness through the ministry of absolution—and then he has conviction. ' I know now,' he says, ' because I have tried. I am sure because I have the secret in my own possession. Never mind how it arrived, or what can be said against it. Here it is ; I can feel it within my soul ; I can dispense with all other argument because I have the proof within myself. I know that Christ gives forgiveness through the sacrament of Penance, simply because I know that I am forgiven.'

That is conviction ; and without it neither argument, however skilful, nor eloquence, however impassioned, nor learning, however deep, will make a man a successful witness for Christ. It was Huxley who said that the first requisite of a man of science is moral earnestness. It is certainly the first requisite of the Christian witness. Before ever we can persuade others of the truth of the Catholic Faith we must have made it our own ; it must be wrought into the inmost fibre of our own spiritual experience. Not poets only learn in suffering what they teach in song. It is the novitiate through which every soul must pass who would bring others to the feet of Jesus.

Conviction is the gift of the Holy Ghost. The only way to gain it is to receive it as a free gift from

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God. S. Paul says, 'No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost.' By 'saying,' of course, he means saying from the heart, saying with full conviction of the truth of what is said. If, then, you are acutely conscious of lack of power in argument and conversation to influence others for good, and to convince them of the truth of the Catholic Faith, here is the remedy. Pray to God the Holy Spirit that he will waken in your heart a deepened conviction, a living experience of the truths which you profess. Do not be content with accepting the Creed; pray that you may experience it. Better far to be able to say of one great fundamental truth, 'I am convinced that this is true,' than to say perfunctorily of a hundred dogmas, 'I accept them all.' The corporate experience of the Church is wider far than your individual experience, and she rightly calls you to accept on her authority many things of which you may not have had, and may never gain, personal knowledge. But, so far as witnessing to others is concerned, it is the truths that are really part of you and that are verified by your own experience that count. When once you can say of a truth, not merely, 'I believe it,' but 'I am convinced of it,' then you will be able to witness for it to others, for it will be no longer you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

III

The next thing that is needed for Christian witness is courage. Think what it must have meant to

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bear witness in Jerusalem on that first Whit-Sunday. It needed courage of no mean order to stand up under the very shadow of the Temple, and, braving the rage of the mob and the malice of the priests, to press home on them the tremendous accusation that they had put to a shameful death the Prince of Life. Think what courage was needed to bear witness in the later days of persecution, when all the world was against the Gospel, when to refuse to burn incense to Cæsar meant a death of lingering agony, when men had to confess their Faith from the rack and the scaffold and the stake.

Courage is equally needed to-day. Not often physical courage, perhaps, at least here in England, but moral courage which is no less difficult a virtue. Are there no factories, no workshops, no offices, no clubs, no homes, where it requires a real effort of moral heroism to bear witness to the truth? In standing up for the Catholic Faith amid un-Catholic surroundings, there may be, there often is, evinced courage as great, heroism as noble, as that of the Saints of old, who died with the song of martyrdom upon their lips.

Courage ought to be the hall-mark of a Catholic, yet what moral cowards we so often are! It is easy enough to witness to our faith in church when everyone else is doing the same thing. But out in the world, how easily our lips are locked, how quickly our witness is silenced, how readily we become the trembling slaves of public opinion. 'You don't mean to say at this time of day you believe that?'

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‘ Surely you are not silly enough to go to confession ! ’ ‘ I should have thought you would have had more sense than to be taken in so easily.’ Remarks of this kind are enough to silence us ; sometimes, indeed, not even a word is necessary. A sarcastic laugh, a curl of the lip, a scarcely perceptible raising of the eyebrow will shame some of us out of our profession. Meanwhile the opponents of Christianity are fearless enough ; they are not ashamed to deny the Faith of Christ Crucified. Are his followers to be the only people who are afraid to proclaim their belief, who cannot even bear a little laughter in defence of what they know to be true ? Depend upon it, we do not really hold the Catholic Faith unless we are prepared, when occasion demands, to own it, and to exult in owning it before the world.

Here, again, we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit. He is the Paraclete, and the word Paraclete means not only Comforter, but Giver of Fortitude. He dwells within us, the same Spirit who changed the cowardly Peter of the Passion into the fearless Peter of Pentecost ; the same Spirit who gave courage to the martyrs and boldness to the Saints. If we will but pray to him to give us the courage that we need, if we will but stir up the gift that is in us by the laying-on of hands, the needed strength will surely come, the needed help be given, and once again, as in apostolic days, men will see our boldness and take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.

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IV

The third essential element in power for witness is character. Not only must we be convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith ; not only must we be bold to own it before the world ; we must *live* it, if our witness is to be anything but a miserable sham. ‘Do not speak to me,’ said Emerson once, with a pardonable exaggeration, ‘what you are is thundering so loud that I cannot hear what you say.’ It is what we are that matters most in witnessing ; it is character that is the real secret of influence. We may be unlearned in theology, and unpersuasive in argument, but if we are trying to live holy lives we shall witness to Jesus not merely by what we say, but by what we are, and that is the greatest witness of all. The Christian character speaks for him with irresistible eloquence ; it recommends prayer and sacraments and worship and all that brings men close to God by the mere fact of its spontaneous, incomparable beauty. And the Christian character is the work of the Holy Ghost. ‘The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.’ These things are the distinguishing characteristics of the Christian life ; they give it a stamp which is quite unmistakable ; they mark it off from mere conventional, respectable morality ; they proclaim it to be no human product, but the veritable work of God the Holy Ghost within the soul. Reality in the Catholic life is beyond all question the primary

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essential in witness-bearing, to which all else is of necessity subordinate ; and it is well that we should remember this in our work for the Catholic Revival. One thing above all else the Tractarians gave to the world—the convincing argument of Christ-like lives ; and, if we are rightly to carry on their labours for the conversion of England, we too must try in the power of the Holy Ghost to live the blessed Faith which we proclaim. The generation which is watching us so closely will certainly judge us by our works ; charity and holiness, just because they are the true Catholic realities, are the best form of Catholic propaganda. ‘ The influence which elevates, which purifies, which sweetens, which cares for the poor and needy, which does something for human society, which lays its subtle touch of healing on the leprosy of life, which is humble, gentle, sympathetic, forbearing, will be welcomed first as a friend, ultimately as the messenger of Christ. That which screams and scolds, which vents its puny bitterness, which hurls its lilliputian anathemas, will be left severely alone to mend its temper and improve its manners. In this day of critical examination, any religion will appear but a barren and worthless stem which does not clothe itself in the blossoms of self-sacrifice, and bear the fruits of love.’

Such, then, is the threefold power of the Holy Ghost, which enables us to bear faithful witness to Jesus : the power of conviction, the power of courage, the power of holiness. It is in proportion as we use that power as an influence dominating our wills,

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controlling our thoughts, directing our conduct, that we shall be able to obey our Saviour's parting charge, and thus add our individual testimony to the record of the witnessing Church.

Trinity Sunday

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‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.’ 2 CORINTHIANS xiii. 14

I

ON all sides to-day there is a persistent demand for what is called a practical religion. In religion, as in politics and economics and everything else, people are becoming more and more impatient with the theorists; they have no use whatever for a faith that is set forth like a proposition in logic, or which has to be worked out like a mathematical problem. They want a religion that can be vindicated in experience, that finds its proof not in books or in arguments, but in the way it helps them to meet the trials and difficulties of daily life. All this finds expression in the popular phrase that it doesn't matter what a man believes, so long as he is living a good life. While it is most important to insist, first, that Catholic truth is objective, and has its own intrinsic importance apart altogether from its influence on conduct, and secondly, that the quality of a man's life will depend enormously on what he believes, we ought, I am sure, to have great sympathy with the point of view here suggested. It

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is a most hopeful thing that so many people are coming to regard their religion not as a Sunday liability, but as a week-day asset, not merely as an obligation to be discharged by professing a creed, but as an inspiration to be realised in the service of God in common life.

Now, at first sight, this demand for a practical religion seems to have very little in common with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Of all the truths of the Faith, this might well seem to be the one which is most completely out of touch with common life. Many people regard it as a metaphysical puzzle, an inscrutable labyrinthine enigma, which seems plainly contrary to reason, but which the Church, for some reason best known to herself, has declared must be believed on pain of eternal damnation. They accept it, perhaps, either because they are too devout, or too intellectually lazy, or too theologically indifferent, to question it. But they do not really believe it ; or, at any rate, they do not think it makes very much difference to a man whether he believes it or not. I will try to show that it makes all the difference, that the man who has an intelligent belief in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is far better equipped to fight the battle of life than the man who has not. I do not say that he is always a better man than the Unitarian ; but I do say that he ought to be.

II

Let me begin by stating as clearly as I can exactly what is meant by believing in the Holy Trinity. I

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want, as far as is possible, to avoid using technical theological language, and I will therefore put the matter in this way: By believing in the Holy Trinity, we mean believing that Jesus Christ is God, that the Father whom he revealed to us is God, and that the Holy Spirit whom he promised to send to us is also God; and yet that they are not three different Gods, but one God. This belief is based on the direct revelation of our blessed Lord. He taught men to pray to their Father in Heaven; he declared that he himself, their Saviour and Brother, was one with the Father; and he constantly spoke of the Holy Spirit whom he would send to abide with them as distinct both from the Father and from himself, and yet as united to both on a plane of existence infinitely above that of all created beings. Yet his whole teaching is based on the fundamental truth that there is only one God. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the summing-up of that teaching. It is not a definition of God. Unfortunately it has often been so regarded, but as it issued, warm and living, from the lips of Jesus it was nothing of the sort. It was a description of God as he comes into touch with human life, as he creates, and blesses, and pardons, and helps mankind. How could such a doctrine be anything other than practical?

And if it is not unpractical, it is not unreasonable, either. The difficulty here arises not so much from the doctrine itself, as from the theological language in which it is expressed. Thus, for instance, the name Trinity is itself misleading, because, while it affirms

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the existence of the eternal Three, it contains nothing to suggest that the Three eternally constitute the unity of God. The Christian doctrine is a doctrine of Triunity rather than of Trinity. Again, words change their meaning in the course of time, and the words Incomprehensible, Substance, Proceeding, Person, in the Athanasian Creed, mean something different from what they meant in the fifth century when that Creed was formulated. This is especially the case with the word Person. When we speak of a person, our idea is that of a being with an independent life, separate from all other beings ; and to say in this sense that three persons are one, and one is three, is simply contradictory and absurd. But the idea of three forms of consciousness in one being is not unreasonable ; it is a difficulty to the imagination, but it is not a difficulty to the intellect. It transcends human experience, but it is in the closest analogy with it. Indeed, in a sense it is easier for us to believe in it than for our forefathers. Modern knowledge agrees perfectly with the Christian revelation in leading us to believe that the Universe is One, and that God is One. No other belief is possible to an educated man to-day. And yet, the more we learn about the Universe, the more we become conscious that within its unity there is a manifold variety. All our singulars turn into plurals ; all our ones branch out into threes. We cannot get away from the Trinity, we meet it everywhere. It is as much in nature as in theology ; as much in the grass-blade as in the Creed ; as much

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in every soul as in the great mystic unity of the God-head. Think, for instance, of a leaf; it is one definite thing, and yet it has three distinct essences—colour, shape, and size. The colour is not the shape, and the shape is not the size, and the size is not the colour; yet they all form together one unity, one single conception, one idea, the idea of a leaf. You cannot separate them; if you could the leaf would cease to exist. Or think of yourself; you are one being, and yet you are composed of body, mind, and spirit. Or think of your mind; it is one mind, but it consists of three separate forms of consciousness, your will, your affections, and your intellect, three distinct things, yet all bound inseparably together into one unity. Or think of an argument; it consists of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. Take one of them away, and you would find that you had taken the argument away. So it is everywhere and in everything. It is impossible to get rid of the Trinity. Look at this single man; is he a family? Certainly not. See him as he leads his bride from the altar. Are these two a family? No, they are not. We must wait awhile; wait till a little plaintive cry is heard in the house, and tiny fingers come clutching at the heart-strings of father and mother. Then, as we gaze at them, bending over the cradle which holds them both, we know that the miracle of unity has been performed, and we can say: Here at last is a family, for these three are one. I am not suggesting that these analogies are anything more than partial and imperfect illustrations of a

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Divine Mystery which altogether transcends both our experience and our imagination. But surely it is not contrary to reason to believe that this deep law of variety in unity which runs through all life is applicable in the highest and most complete sense to him who is the source of life.

III

Let us now pass on to consider the practical value of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in its relation to human need. S. Paul gives beautiful expression to it in his familiar benediction : ' The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.' That is how he thought of God, and that is how he invoked the blessing of God upon his readers. Do you not see at once how intensely practical it is ? S. Paul is not here talking philosophy ; he is talking religion. He is not describing metaphysical distinctions in the inner life of God ; he is telling men how God will bless and help and save them. He is telling them that all their Christian experience, the love which had been revealed to them through Christ, the help they had gained through Christ, the realisation of the Divine Presence which had been opened to them through Christ, are all of them rooted and grounded in the very Being of God. This is why belief in the Holy Trinity is such an intensely practical thing. It leads us to seek all that we need for good and noble living, from God and from God alone. The difference between the man

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who does not believe in the Holy Trinity and the man who does, is just this, that the one is always looking down, seeking help and inspiration from human systems and human teachers ; and the other is always looking up, seeking help and inspiration from God. Let me give some illustrations of what I mean. First, take sorrow. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, and there is no human life into which sorrow of one kind or another does not sooner or later come. When sorrow does come, it makes all the difference in the world whether we believe in the Holy Trinity or not, for, if we do so believe, we shall look for comfort not merely to earthly helps, but to our Father which is in Heaven. Here is one on whom the shadow of a great grief has suddenly fallen. Close at hand are the lower helps. Her friends try to console her by reminding her of the relief that time will bring. As the days pass, they say, the burden will grow lighter. Or they bid her think of the thousands of others who have lost their nearest and dearest. Well-meant, such consolations, but how insipid they really are. Tennyson tells us of the pallid consolations which were offered to him when he was grieving at the loss of his dearest friend :

One writes that other friends remain,
That loss is common to the race ;
And common is the commonplace,
And vacant chaff well-meant for grain.
That loss is common, does not make
My own less bitter ; rather more.

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What a change it is to that stricken wife or mother when she turns her eyes away from the valleys of human consolation, and gazes up to the hills to seek her comfort from God. What an anodyne for her grief when she realises that God is her Father, and that underneath her are the everlasting arms. Then she understands that she is not really parted from the loved one she thought she had lost ; they are only dwelling for a little while in different rooms of their Father's home. She turns to that wonderful twelfth chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews which tells her that affliction is a proof of the love of God, who loveth whom he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. She finds her true comfort, her real relief, in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God ; and peace comes into her heart as she looks for help to the very nature and being of the Eternal, and says : Our Father which art in Heaven . . . thy Will be done.

Think, next, of temptation. Perhaps we do not all of us yet know what it is to have to meet great sorrow, but we all know what it is to have to meet temptation. And, in the never-ending struggle with temptation, nothing but belief in the Holy Trinity can enable us to gain a real and lasting victory. No doubt there are many other things that will help us in a way. There is the feeling of self-respect, the fear of consequences, the dictates of prudence, the influence of good friends, the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, regarded only as a great Saint who lived centuries ago. But these

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of themselves are not enough for the permanent conquest of human passions. If a man would gain the power which will give him the victory not merely over this or that particular temptation, but over all, he must seek his help in the very nature and being of God. He must believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, who died to save him, is no mere man, but the very and eternal God, whose forgiveness given in absolution will cleanse him from his sin, and whose Flesh and Blood given in Holy Communion will endue him with the strength and power that he needs. We are never safe in temptation until through prayer and sacrament we have united our weak, frail humanity to the divine humanity of Jesus Christ, and found in God not only a Father, but a Saviour, not only a Creator, but a Friend.

Once more, see how belief in the Holy Trinity offers the only sure relief to the man who is assailed with doubt. There is, of course, nothing to be said for the dishonest doubter, for the man who parades intellectual difficulties about the Faith as an excuse for indulging his vices. But for the honest doubter, the man who is in sympathy with the spirit of the Gospel, but who feels great difficulty in accepting certain doctrines, we ought to have the greatest possible sympathy. He wants to believe in the Godhead of Jesus Christ, in his Virgin Birth and Resurrection, and Presence in the Holy Sacrament, and the rest, but he has a secret fear in his heart as to whether it is all really true. His whole soul cries out for some definite authority that will set his

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doubts at rest, and lead him to conviction. The simple, fatally easy thing to do is to seek help from below and not from above. He seeks authority in an infallible book, and he says: 'I will believe whatever is written in the Bible, without enquiry or examination !' Or he finds his authority in some trusted teacher, and he says: 'Father So-and-so prepared me for Confirmation, and I will believe whatever he taught me, and no more.' Or he seeks authority in an infallible Pope, and he says, 'I will submit myself to the Church of Rome, and give up the right to think for myself about religious doctrines at all.' The powerful appeal which the Roman Church undoubtedly makes to so many people who are outside her to-day arises largely from the fact that, amid all the welter of unbelief and misbelief and half-belief that surrounds us, she alone claims to speak with infallible authority, and so appears to offer an escape from religious doubt and perplexity. But there is no final escape from personal responsibility in faith any more than in morals. In this sense private judgment is the formidable possession of every one of us, from which we cannot be rid even if we would. We may accept a belief in obedience to some external authority, but we can only gain conviction of its truth through personal experience. The only true escape from doubt lies in seeking conviction from God, and in daring to believe that, if we ask him, he will send to us his Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth ; that, while he uses the Bible, the Church, and the experience of

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others as the channels of his teaching, he himself is behind them all as the supreme Teacher, and the final Source of Truth. Only when the Church's Creed, accepted at first on her authority, has passed through the illumination of God's Holy Spirit into our own personal conviction, only then shall we have gained a real faith, a faith which no doubt can ever shatter, and no discouragement ever destroy.

I have tried to show you how the doctrine of the Holy Trinity touches practical life, how it enshrines the greatest and most precious truth of our religion, that the help that saves us, and the love that enfolds us, and the light that guides us, are all alike grounded in the inner life of God. To come back to the point from which we started, the demand for a practical religion can only be properly satisfied by a dogmatic religion, for faith is the ultimate basis of conduct. When the Church declares, 'He therefore that will be saved (i.e. be whole and complete) must thus think of the Trinity,' she can appeal for proof of that tremendous affirmation to the experience of the Saints. They lived the highest type of life, because they had the highest type of faith. They were what they were and did what they did, because they believed in the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Ghost.

THE INCARNATION AND THE EUCCHARIST

‘Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of
the world.’ S. MATTHEW xxvii. 20

I

IF, as you were leaving church after a High Mass, you were accosted by a stranger who told you that he had come out of curiosity, and asked you to be good enough, since he was completely ignorant of the Christian religion, to explain the meaning of the service which had just taken place, you would find that your explanation would have to begin a very long way back. Your questioner could not possibly understand the Mass unless you linked it on to the Incarnation. You would have to tell him that nearly two thousand years ago, God, in his tender love for a weary and sinful world, became Man in the Person of his only Son, and was born miraculously of a pure Virgin. You would go on to explain that the Divine Child grew up to manhood in a village home ; that he then went about teaching and helping people, performing many wonderful miracles, and especially gathering round him a little band of followers to form the nucleus of a Society

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which was to carry on his work after he had left the earth. 'When he was thirty-three years old,' you would say, 'he was accused of blasphemy by the officials of the Jewish Church, and, being delivered up by them to the State authorities on a trumped-up charge of sedition, he was put to a cruel and ignominious death. Three days afterwards he came to life again, and during the ensuing forty days he frequently appeared to his disciples, and held long conversations with them. He then bade them farewell, and disappeared from their sight with the promise that he would always be with them. On the night before he was put to death, he had shown them how this promise was to be fulfilled, consecrating bread and wine, and giving these outward things to his disciples to eat and drink with the solemn declaration that they were his Body and his Blood, and with the command that they should repeat his action. Here, then,' you would conclude, 'is the explanation of the service you have just witnessed. We call it the Mass, and in it bread and wine are consecrated in the manner I have just described, and become the Body and Blood of Jesus—for that is the name by which God was known when he lived as Man on the earth. It is in this way that his parting promise is fulfilled for us : "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."'

This, or something like it, is the explanation you would give ; and when you had finished, there are several things you might reasonably expect your

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questioner to say. He might say: 'The whole thing is incredible'; or, 'What evidence can you adduce to prove such an astonishing story?' or, 'It is much too good to be true'; or, 'I should like to learn more about it.' But one thing you certainly would not expect him to say. You would, I fancy, be very greatly surprised if he said, 'I can believe the whole story, *except the end of it*. I can believe all the wonderful and miraculous things you have told me about God becoming a baby, and being born of a Virgin, and allowing himself to be put to death, and coming to life again, and appearing and disappearing and founding a Divine Society, and all the rest of it. But I find it quite impossible to believe that God, who in his tender love for man stooped to such amazing condescension two thousand years ago, still dwells among you in your Mass, and gives himself to you under the forms of bread and wine.'

Depend upon it, the Mystery of the Incarnation and the Mystery of the Eucharist stand or fall together. They are truths of the same order, inseparably linked together, equally miraculous, equally mysterious, equally outside the range of scientific proof or disproof. We Catholics have many faults and failings, but disbelief in the Incarnation is not one of them. Indeed, if Jesus be not God, our belief in the Blessed Sacrament is utterly meaningless; for how should a mere man feed us with his body and his blood? On the other hand, the history of the Church shows clearly that,

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whenever the truth of the Real Presence has been denied or neglected, there has been a steady drift away from belief in the Godhead of Christ. It is inevitable that it should be so, for the Eucharist is the extension and the completion of the Incarnation ; it is the means whereby our Saviour does for all ages and for all countries what during his earthly life he did for one age and for one country. He does it now, not as then, in a manner to be apprehended by the natural senses, but just as really and truly, although his way of acting is concealed under the sacramental veils. He came to be always with his people, to be their treasure and their life, their friend and their companion, their help and their reward, their strength, their rest, their refreshment. That which he did for the whole human race in his Incarnation he repeats and continues and applies to each one of us in the Blessed Sacrament. He not only dwelt among his first disciples ; he dwells among us still. 'Lo,' he has promised, 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' Kneeling before his Altar Throne in his Sacramental Presence, we may tell him of our needs, and offer him our praises, and sympathise with him in his sufferings, and confess to him our sins, and assure him of our love. Thus does the Blessed Eucharist continually appear what it is, the extension and the completion of the Incarnation. That Divine Mystery which is enshrined on our altars is rightly called Emmanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us.

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II

It is, I am sure, particularly important at the present time, both for the defence of the Faith and for the increase of our personal devotion, that we should constantly bear in mind this close and intimate connection between the Incarnation and the Eucharist. It will help us to do so if we consider in detail some of the remarkable parallels between these two great Mysteries.

That which strikes us first in this connection is the contrast in both between the outward appearance and the inward reality. As in the Incarnation the Godhead was hidden away, so it is in the Eucharist ; that which appeared to the Shepherds and to the Magi was the human form of a little Child ; that which appears to the communicant is the earthly form of bread and wine. But in the Sacrament, as in the Incarnation, the earthly conceals the heavenly ; there is in both, under the outward appearance, the Real Presence of God. He who was content to hide his Divinity under the veil of Manhood, is content now to hide his Sacred Presence under the veils of the Sacrament. Yet so real and true is the union in both cases that, as in the Incarnation, those who saw and touched our Lord were seeing and touching God ; so in the Eucharist, when we see and touch the consecrated bread and wine, we see and touch the Holy Body and the Precious Blood, which, by the power of the Holy Ghost, they have become. There is, of course, this

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difference between the two Mysteries ; that whereas in the Incarnation only the Godhead was hidden while the Manhood was revealed ; in the Holy Sacrament both are concealed. Yet in both the contrast between the outward and the inward remains equally marvellous. It is not more incredible that Jesus should be hidden beneath the outward appearance of the Host than that God should be hidden beneath the outward appearance of Jesus. ' Christ in the Sacrament,' says Bishop Andrewes, ' is not altogether unlike Christ in the crib. To the crib we may well liken the husk or outward symbols of it. Outwardly, it seems little worth, but is rich of contents, as was the crib with Christ in it. For what are they but weak and poor elements, of themselves ; yet in them we find Christ, even as the Shepherds found in the beasts' crib the Food of Angels.'

A second parallel between the Incarnation and the Eucharist is to be found in the fact that in both Mysteries the Divine Presence is only to be realised by faith. There are three faculties of sight—sense, reason, and faith. Sense sees only the outward appearance of objects ; reason interprets the realities that lie behind them ; but those realities can only be realised and apprehended by faith. The unbelieving Jews, who saw Jesus only with the eye of sense, could see that he was a carpenter, but nothing more. Nicodemus, by the exercise of his reason, knew him to be a teacher sent from God ; for no man, said he, could do such miracles except

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God were with him. But S. Peter knew Christ to be more than a carpenter, and a teacher sent from God, for to the dictates of sense and reason he added the illumination of faith. When Jesus asked his disciples, 'Who say ye that I the Son of Man am?' Peter answered, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said, 'Flesh and blood (i.e. the knowledge that comes by sense and reason) hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven' (i.e. you have learnt it by the illumination of faith).

In precisely the same manner we realise the Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Sense tells us that what we see has the appearance of bread and wine; and sense can go no further. Reason takes into account, considers, and interprets the promises of our Saviour, the teaching of the Apostles, the unvarying tradition of the Church, and, above all, the wonderful moral and spiritual effects of Holy Communion; and reason says, like Nicodemus, 'This cannot be ordinary bread and wine, for bread and wine could not possibly do such things unless God were with them.' But sense and reason need to be elevated and corrected by faith before they can so realise the Presence of Jesus under the sacramental veils as to behold his glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. This does not mean that faith *makes* Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament, any more than faith made him present during his earthly life. He was there in the fullness of his Godhead, in the

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manger, in the temple, by the lakeside, on the Cross, whether men recognised his Divinity or not ; the power and virtue were within him, whether men had faith to be healed by him or not. But as then, so now ; it is faith which recognises, and faith which adores, and faith which appropriates the benefits he offers. And as then, so now ; if he can do no mighty works among us, it is only because of our unbelief.

So I might go on to speak of parallel after parallel between the earthly and the sacramental life of Jesus. Let me remind you of only one other, which is indeed the summary of them all, and which suggests the practical application of everything we have been considering. In both great Mysteries, God our Saviour demands from us the same adoration. As S. Thomas worshipped our Lord in the Upper Room when he fell at his feet, and cried out, 'My Lord and my God,' so we worship him in the Mass and in the Tabernacle. The Word made flesh not only dwelt among men once, he dwells among us still, and we give to him precisely the same adoration as we should give him were he visibly present in our midst. Here is the real test of a true Catholic faith. Those who believe that God Incarnate is present in the Sacrament must adore him ; those who do not so adore him cannot really believe that he is here. The Catholic Church, which by Divine faith knows and teaches the Mystery of his Eucharistic Presence, adores him therein all over the world. She has adored him from the beginning,

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she adores him now, and she will adore him till the end of time, till faith becomes vision, and the sacramental veils fade away, and at last we see him face to face.

III

‘Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.’ O gracious promise of Jesus ; how wonderfully it has been fulfilled ! The Incarnation is not merely a story from out the fading past ; it is a fact of present experience. Our Saviour has disappeared from sight, but he has never left his people. Neither ingratitude nor unbelief, neither blasphemy nor sacrilege, have ever made him withdraw the perpetual Presence he has promised. We English Catholics look back with shame and humiliation to the dark days in our history, when the Eucharist was well-nigh universally neglected, and the Sacramental Presence of our Saviour was denied and ridiculed in the very churches which had been built to enshrine it. Yet even in the blackest times there always remained a faithful few who honoured the Holy Sacrament, and held Sacramental Communion with Jesus. Now, blessed be his Holy Name, the sunshine of his Eucharistic Presence is once more flooding our land with light, and in a thousand churches the Mass is restored to its true place as the central act of Christian worship, and the sanctuary lamp tells where Christ dwells among his people in the Sacrament of his Love.

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Let us mark this great festival by dedicating ourselves anew to the worship of Jesus in the Eucharist, resolving that we will do everything we can, and suffer anything that may come upon us, to promote his honour and glory, and to diffuse his blessings among men. In one terrible sense, the Incarnation is being renewed to-day ; rejection, reproach, denial, indifference, hostility, still track the steps of the ever-present Saviour. Be it ours to see to it that the Incarnation is renewed in a different way. Let the devotion of the Shepherds, the adoration of the Magi, the tender love of Mary, the penitence of the Magdalene, the hospitality of Zacchæus, the zeal of S. Peter, the faith of the Apostles—let such things as these find their modern counterpart in our Eucharistic devotion. So we shall find in rich experience the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Here his presence is veiled, but devotion makes the veil increasingly transparent. A sense of nearness, a consciousness of relation to him, become so vivid and sensible that they turn the heart away from all else to him, our only Lord, whom not having seen we love ; 'in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

Feast of S. Mary Magdalene

THE BIRD WITH THE BROKEN PINION

‘Mary, called Magdalene, out of whom went
seven devils.’ S. LUKE viii. 2

I

WHAT an astonishingly candid book the Bible is ! It makes no attempt to whitewash its heroes ; it shows them to us as they really were, with all their sins, stupidities, and follies. David is the man after God’s own heart, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, yet we are given a lurid description of his cowardice, treachery, adultery, and murder. S. Peter is the chief and prince of the Apostles, the rock-man on whose confession of faith the Church is built, yet S. Mark does not fail to tell us that Jesus said to him, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan,’ and the story of his shameful denial is recorded by all four Evangelists with a wealth of circumstantial detail. S. Paul is the great Apostle of the Gentiles, the man to whom, more than anyone else, was due under God the conversion of the Roman Empire, yet S. Luke is careful to inform us that he consented to S. Stephen’s death, and pictures him before his conversion as breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples

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of the Lord. And as for S. Mary Magdalene, the Bible is determined that her past shall not be covered up. In the beautiful story which describes how she anointed the feet of Christ, we are told that she was a sinner, and, lest there should be any doubt as to the nature of her sin, the note is added that she was a woman of the city, or, as we should say, a woman of the streets. When, in the next chapter, S. Luke describes how she followed Christ, and ministered to him of her substance, he will not let us forget what kind of woman she had been; 'Mary, called Magdalene,' he says, 'out of whom went seven devils.' So again is it with the description of the scene on Easter morning, at the end of S. Mark's Gospel. Surely, we can forget all about Mary's scandalous past when we see her so highly privileged and blessed, kneeling in rapt devotion at the feet of Jesus. It seems monstrous to rake up all that old disgraceful story now. When Jesus was risen the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene; is not that enough? No! it is not, says the inspired record. You have left out something, something very important and significant, something which must by no means be forgotten. 'He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.'

These things are written for our learning. It is abundantly clear that the Biblical writers have a purpose in thus insisting on the sins of their heroes, in bidding us mark clearly of what stuff the Saints were made. Let us, then, on the feast of S. Mary

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Magdalene, take the Bible description of her—
'Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils'—and see what lessons it is meant to teach us.

II

First of all, it teaches us that sin leaves its mark. Mary Magdalene is beyond question one of the very greatest of the Saints, but she is still the woman out of whom Jesus cast seven devils. She cannot unwrite the story of her life ; she cannot be what she might have been if she had never sinned. Neither can we. Penitence is a beautiful thing, but it is not so beautiful as innocence. Not only does sin leave its mark on personal character, but it affects other people too. By sinning we throw out a cause into the world which produces effects of evil and of suffering outside ourselves, effects which are often completely untouched by our repentance. George Macdonald, in one of his novels, emphasises with a very tender but a very telling touch this aspect of sin. "Do you know, Wilfred," he makes one of his characters say, "I once shot a little bird, for no good but just to shoot at something. I knew it was wrong, yet I drew the trigger. It dropped, a heap of ruffled feathers ; I shall never get that little bird out of my head ; and the worst of it is that I can never make any atonement." "But God will forgive you, Charlie," says the other. "What do I care for that ?" he replies almost fiercely, "when the bird cannot forgive me." Yes, that is the scar

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that sin leaves, the consequences to others that repentance and forgiveness cannot undo. And, unhappily, the harm we have done by our sins is seldom confined to a heap of ruffled feathers ; it is to be seen in embittered homes, in ruined lives, in wrecked ideals, in shattered characters. It was the cry of one who had sinned deeply. 'The scars remain, scars never to be eradicated, never to be removed in this life. I have been plucked like a brand from the burning, but the mark of the fire is on me.' This has been the feeling of all true penitents. There is a tradition that, to the end of his life, S. Peter could never hear a cock crow without bursting into tears. And can we imagine that S. Mary Magdalene, as she followed Christ, as she sat at his feet and listened to his words, was quite content and comfortable, never giving a thought to those whom she had led into sin, and who because of her were sinning still ? If we can, we have never realised the true meaning of penitence. This is the awful tragedy of sin, that even when it is forgiven its effects go on, and, do what we will, we cannot stop them :

The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on, nor all your piety nor wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

For all of us who have sinned greatly, who have been the cause of sin and suffering in others, who have embittered a home-life that can never be sweet again,

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who have infected with our own sins the souls of those we love, this is the awful thought which tints the joyous landscape of our Christian life with sadness : we cannot undo the past.

III

Here, then, is the first lesson of this Festival ; sin leaves its mark, not only on our own lives and characters, but on the lives and characters of other people. Mary Magdalene, the chosen friend of Christ, is still Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, who had committed sins which were still unwinding their fatal coil of evil in the world around her, even as she ministered to Christ, or knelt weeping at the foot of the Cross, or welcomed him on Easter morning. That would be a sad and dreary message if it stood alone, but, thank God, it does not stand alone. It is balanced by another truth. Though sin leaves its mark, yet it does not debar the penitent sinner from doing great service in the Kingdom of God, and achieving great sanctity, and enjoying great peace of conscience. ‘Thy sins are forgiven,’ said Jesus to Mary, ‘go in peace.’ Could she have peace while her sins were still alive, still polluting the souls of others ? Yes, she could, for she trusted in Christ to do for them what she could not do herself ; more than that, by her repentance she identified herself with him in his atoning work, she took up her cross and followed

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him to Calvary. Her shipwrecked life, salved by penitence and reconstructed by forgiveness, was put into commission again, no longer as a privateer, but as a lifeboat, to save those who were being engulfed in those cruel waters of lustful passion beneath which she all but perished. Her very sin marked out the lines of her future service. When, in her deep penitence, she bathed the Saviour's feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment, he said, 'Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, this that this woman has done shall be told as a memorial of her.' And what a fruitful telling it has been ! All through the Christian ages her blessed work of rescue has been going on, and countless perishing souls, who would have despaired had they found in the Gospel only the example of stainless innocence, have been brought to the feet of Jesus by the example of Mary's penitence.

But the bird with the broken pinion
Never soared so high again.

That is the first lesson of S. Mary Magdalene's life and service. We cannot be as we might have been if we had never sinned. But, thank God, that is not all :

But the bird with the broken pinion
Kept another from the snare,
And the life that sin had stricken
Raised another from despair.

THE BIRD WITH BROKEN PINION

Each loss has its compensations,
There is healing for every pain,
Though the bird with the broken pinion
Never soars so high again.

IV

‘Mary, called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils’ ! We will not rob her of her title. It was once her shame, but it has become her glory ; it sums up in telling phrase the glorious hope of the only Gospel that can be good news to sinful men and women like ourselves. For it tells us that, though our sin cannot be obliterated, it can be so transfigured by forgiveness that it will shine out as a beacon to light other souls to Christ. Christian biography is full of the stories of men and women whose holiness and usefulness were the direct outcome of hideous memories of former transgression. So may it be with us. I do not want to be forgiven, if forgiveness only means a private understanding with God that because of what Jesus suffered I shall be let off the personal consequences of my wrongdoing. I could not accept such a forgiveness and retain a shred of self-respect. But if forgiveness means that when Christ died on the Cross he bore not my sins only, but the sins of those whom I have led astray ; if it means that when I am forgiven, he will give me a work to do and a burden to bear, that I may have a share in his atoning work—then I want to be forgiven more than anything else in the world.

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Perhaps you have sinned very deeply in the past ; perhaps you are thinking as you read these lines of someone—it may be more than one—who is living a godless life largely as a result of your past influence and example. Do not despair. It may be you will never be able to help the particular people you have injured and led astray. You must leave them to Christ, sure that, in his infinite love and justice, he will never impute to them sin which is really yours. But you can repair other injuries, you can alleviate other sufferings, you can influence other souls for good. And the first step towards doing that, for you as for S. Mary Magdalene, is repentance. You know well what repentance involves : first, a hearty sorrow for your past sins with a firm purpose of amendment ; secondly, full and frank confession ; thirdly, the determination to make what satisfaction you can for the wrong you have done. It may be you have never yet faced the duty of confession ; perhaps, though at times you have been brought to the very edge of the waters of pardon, you still stand shivering on the brink, lacking the courage to take the final plunge. Let Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, plead with you. Face your past and tell out its black story in humble penitence, that you may receive absolution, and so be able to share in the redemptive work of Jesus. You have been a failure as was Mary, and yet for you, as for her, life still holds glorious possibilities of service. You too may anoint the feet of Christ with your ointment of devotion ; you too may minister to

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him of your substance ; you too may stand beneath his Cross and share his sufferings ; you too may see the vision of his risen glory ; and for you, as for her, the path of contrition will lead through the open Wounds of Jesus into the home of his Sacred Heart, where you will find the peace that passeth understanding.

Assumption of our Lady

HONOUR TO WHOM HONOUR

‘Render therefore to all their dues . . . honour
to whom honour.’ ROMANS xiii. 7

I

LET us apply these words to the most illustrious of all God’s creatures, whose happy death and reception into Heaven the whole of Catholic Christendom commemorates on August 15th. The Church of England emphasises the special devotion which is due to our Blessed Lady by setting apart no fewer than five feast days in her honour—her Conception, her Nativity, the Annunciation, the Purification, and the Visitation. It is true that this feast of the Assumption is not found in the Prayer Book Calendar, having been omitted in Reformation times. But this was done with no idea of derogating from our Lady’s unique dignity, but simply because an unhistorical and untrustworthy tradition had become popular in the Middle Ages, to the effect that her body passed from the earthly to the resurrection state without undergoing corruption. But the tradition is in no sense involved in this commemoration. Our observance of this feast simply witnesses to our belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary has passed to

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her reward, and is in enjoyment of heavenly bliss. In primitive times the word 'assumption' was applied to the death of any Saint, and, just as we commemorate the passing of other Saints, of Peter and James and John and the rest, so surely it is reasonable and right that we should commemorate the passing of her who is, beyond controversy, the very greatest of them all. We look forward hopefully to the time when this feast will be restored to its rightful place in our Calendar; meanwhile we observe it as we observe other days which are not officially recognised—the harvest thanksgiving, the dedication of the church, the commemoration of Corpus Christi, and All Souls, falling back for our authority on universal and age-long custom, as we have a perfect right to do, since we claim to believe in the whole Catholic Church, and to form a part of it. Let us thank God that, with the revival of Catholic life and devotion in the Church of England, this feast is once more coming to its own; year by year it is being observed in an increasing number of churches with due honour and devotion; and love of Mary is once more spreading over the length and breadth of England, which in days of yore was her dowry and her shrine.

Devotion to Mary springs naturally and inevitably from a true and living faith in the Incarnation. Here, as elsewhere, it is our belief in the Godhead of Jesus which justifies and explains not only the general principles, but the minutest details of our religious practice. Over the whole of Catholic

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worship and devotion is written the superscription, 'Jesus only, Jesus always, all for Jesus.' Wherever his presence is, we view that place as consecrated ground ; whatever his hand has touched is for us ever holy. It is just because of her unique relation to Jesus that we love and reverence our Lady and exalt her above all other Saints. It is because from out the countless millions of the human race she was pre-elected and pre-ordained to be the physical and the moral instrument of the Incarnation. We worship our Saviour because he is God. We honour Mary because she is his Mother.

II

His Mother ! Have you ever tried to think out what that means ? 'Mother' is a little word, and yet there is only one other word in the language which is richer in unutterable significance. That other word is 'God.' What shall we say of the two words when they are joined together ? I have set out to describe the blessedness of that Mother whose Son was God, and here at the outset I realise that the task is far beyond my powers. I can do no more than try, in feeble and broken words, to suggest to you something at least of what that Motherhood involved.

First, it involved a unique relationship to Jesus. The closest earthly tie we know is that which binds a mother to her child. Yet this tie was closer still. For Mary was the Virgin Mother : she was the sole earthly parent of Jesus. From her and from

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her alone he drew that human nature which was the earthly instrument of his Divinity: those feet, beautiful upon the mountains of Galilee, publishing glad tidings of peace; those hands whose powerful touch gave healing to the sick, and sight to the blind, and life to the dead; those lips that spake as man never spake; that Sacred Heart into which she transfused her own blood which he poured out on Calvary to the last drop for our redemption. To have given all this to the Incarnate Saviour constitutes for Mary a claim on him, an interest in him, a relationship to him, which none else can ever share. The Saints are the brethren of Jesus by adoption; she is his Mother by nature. They have affinity with him, but she holds to him the first degree of consanguinity. To her alone among created beings can we say:

Thy Babe, he lay upon thy breast,
To thee he cried for food.
Thy tender nursing soothed to rest
The Incarnate Son of God.

Again, the motherhood of Mary involved as a necessary consequence the loving guardianship of Jesus when a Child. Think of the sacred office of an earthly mother. There is no relationship more beautiful and more fruitful of consequences; there is none that a true heart cherishes with deeper gratitude, even when death and time and change have left it but a memory. 'It is to my mother,' says S. Augustine in his *Confessions*, 'that I owe all.

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If I am thy child at all, O God, it is because thou gavest me such a mother.' Yes, a good mother's influence is the dearest and most potent under Heaven. It follows us wheresoever we may journey; it abides with us to the end. 'When the shadows of life deepen, and the darkness gathers over us, the sweetness of a mother's voice, and the memory of a mother's prayers, are like the day-star's gleam across the curtained sky.'

Was it otherwise with *the* Mother and *the* Child? The first thirty years of the Incarnate Life, with the exception of three days, are summed up in the words: 'He was subject to his parents.' And through all that time Mary was the Minister of the Will of the Father to his Son. She commanded his words and actions; she first taught those baby lips to utter words of prayer; she fed the human mind as she fed the human body of her Creator. Nay! the matter becomes too difficult and too mysterious for human speech; she first expounded to God Incarnate from psalm and prophecy and law the things concerning himself.

Then, too, besides unique relationship and loving guardianship, the Divine Maternity involved for Mary intimate companionship with Jesus. She alone both saw him born and saw him die; she alone heard both his first infant cry and his last commendation of his soul into his Father's keeping. She shared his exile in Egypt. For thirty years she lived under the same roof with him, receiving his confidences, rejoicing in his joys, sorrowing in his

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sorrows. During our Saviour's public ministry, her long companionship with him is broken for a while, but it is only broken to be renewed more closely in the Passion. When one Apostle has betrayed Christ, and another has denied him; when all the disciples have forsaken him and fled; when his relatives are ashamed of kindred with him; when he is surrounded by a cruel and vindictive mob—then does his Mother come to his side that she may share his sufferings. She walks in his blood-stained footsteps along the Way of Sorrows, she stands fainting in her mighty sorrow under the Cross while the light dies out of creation; she holds the dead body of Jesus in her arms; and she hears the last accents of his blessing when he ascends into Heaven.

Again, Mary's Motherhood entailed for her close fellowship in the sufferings of Jesus. The sword indeed pierced her own heart also. She wears not only the pale diadem of stainless purity, but the blood-red crown of martyrdom. None else save him who died for us has ever known the poignancy of suffering as did she, who was in very truth baptised with his baptism of pain, and drank his cup of agony—aye! even to the bitter dregs.

Once more, as this feast reminds us, Mary's Motherhood involves her close fellowship with Christ in Heaven. As she was the closest sharer of his sorrows, so now she is the closest partaker of his joy. We know, from the teaching of our Lord and his Apostles, that all places are not the same in

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Heaven. In the resurrection, one star differeth from another star in glory ; one is given command over five, another over ten cities ; there is a left-hand and a right-hand of the throne ; the Apostles are to sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And, as the Church has always taught, the highest place of all belongs to Mary, not only because she is the Mother of God, but because, in her response to her unparalleled vocation, she corresponded, more perfectly and more exactly than any other creature, to the will and the purpose of Almighty God. Now that Christ reigns in glory, she is with him. ‘ The accident of death breaks no tie in the Eternal.’ Christ has raised our human nature to the Throne of Bliss. He reigns in Heaven not only as the Son of God, but as the Son of Mary. And just as for ourselves we cherish the blessed hope of reunion with those we love on the other side of death, just as we believe that mother and child will meet on the further shore, and know each other once again, so it is with Jesus and Mary. Is it possible to imagine the contrary ? Can we possibly suppose that now that Jesus has ascended to the Father he no longer displays the feelings of an affectionate Son, that, while he has welcomed other Saints and said to each one of them, ‘ Well done, thou good and faithful servant : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,’ he has disowned and neglected her who bore so much for him, and suffered so much for him, and displayed such tender love for him in the days of his earthly estate ? Surely it is natural and reasonable

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to believe that, inasmuch as the dignity and holiness of the Mother of God raised her upon earth above every order and degree in the human race, so likewise in Heaven she preserves the same elevation beyond all competition. As Bishop Ken has taught us to sing :

All Saints are by her Son's dear influence blest,
She kept the very Fountain at her breast ;
The Son adored and nursed by the sweet Maid,
A thousandfold of love for love repaid.

Heaven with transcendent joys her entrance graced,
Next to his Throne, her Son his Mother placed ;
And here below, now she's of Heaven possest,
All generations are to call her blest.

III

‘Render therefore to all their dues . . . honour to whom honour.’ Are we rendering to Mary the honour that is due to her ? I press that question in no conventional way, but with a deep and passionate sense of its importance. Devotion to our Lady may have been exaggerated in the Middle Ages, it may be exaggerated in a part of Christendom to-day, but, taking a general view of Christian history, it has always been a purifying and an ennobling influence, and has acted as a most powerful aid to the development of the full possibilities of spiritual life. Ruskin, who, trained as he was in the narrowest school of Scotch Calvinism, had little sympathy with Catholic principles, has, in well-known words, borne very remarkable witness to the power of devotion

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to Mary in uplifting the lives of women : ‘ After the most careful examination,’ he says, ‘ neither as adversary nor friend of the influences of Catholicity for good and evil, I am persuaded that devotion to Mary has been one of its noblest and most vital graces, and has never been otherwise than productive of true holiness of life and purity of character. . . . There has probably not been an innocent cottage home throughout the length and breadth of Europe during the whole period of vital Christianity in which the imagined presence of the Madonna has not given sanctity to the humblest duties and comfort to the sorest trials of the lives of women ; and every brightest and loftiest achievement of the arts and strength of manhood has been the fulfilment of the assured prophecy of the Israelite maiden : “ He that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his Name.” ’

The same thing is true of the influence of this devotion in the spiritual life. I speak of that which I do know, for again and again in my ministry I have seen the effect of love of Mary when it has been kindled in the hearts of Christian people. Some of you will remember the fine lines in Keats’s great sonnet, ‘ On first looking into Chapman’s Homer ’ :

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swings into his ken,
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise,
Silent upon a peak in Darien.

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So is it with those who have been accustomed hitherto to look at this truth through the distorting glasses of prejudice, when they realise for the first time the place which our Lady holds in the scheme of redemption. The thought of her great blessedness, and of the unique dignity of her vocation, bursts on their spiritual consciousness with the splendour of a new revelation. They believe in Jesus with a stronger faith, they love him with a deeper love, they reverence him with a profounder devotion, when they contemplate him in conjunction with his Blessed Mother, seeing him as a helpless Infant lying on her lap, or gazing upon his pale and lifeless form laid in her arms, and reading in her sorrow-stricken face the only measure which earth can give of the sufferings he endured for our salvation.

Let us then joyfully take our part in giving honour to Mary and proclaiming her blessed among women. We are in good company in so doing : in the company of the Archangel Gabriel, who was the first to pronounce her blessed ; in the company of Elizabeth, who, filled with the Holy Ghost, echoed the Angel's words ; in the company of Mary herself, who in her *Magnificat* prophesied that all generations should call her blessed ; in the company of the whole Catholic Church which throughout the ages has fulfilled that prophecy ; in the company of our Blessed Saviour who honoured her above all women, in that he chose her to be his Mother. Alas ! that there are Christian people who cannot understand

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these things which to us are so simple, so natural, and so true, and who think to please Jesus by treating with contempt and indifference the Mother who bore him. It is infinitely sad to reflect that here in England the sweet and gentle figure of the Madonna has been dragged from the shrine of devotion into the grim arena of controversial bitterness, and that the undying instinct of Christianity to honour her has been smothered remorselessly for three hundred years, and is only now beginning to reassert itself. This is the result of a long-standing and bitter prejudice which is based on one particular objection. It is important to examine that objection, and to answer it; for, if we can succeed in showing that it is unreasonable, the prejudice founded on it will disappear.

The objection is this : that we Catholics put Mary in the place of God, that the devotion we give to her is something taken away from him. We ought to deal very patiently and tenderly with this objection, because, after all, it does spring from a zeal for the honour of our Lord, albeit not a zeal according to knowledge. But it is a complete misunderstanding of our belief and practice. No instructed Catholic could possibly confuse the honour he pays to Mary with the worship he offers to Jesus Christ ; the two things differ not only in degree, but in kind. Between the Son and the Mother, closely related as they are, there is yet an infinity that can never be spanned, for the Son is God, the Mother only the best and purest of his creatures. To him we give the worship

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and adoration which are due to God and to God alone ; to her we give only that which may rightly be given to a creature—profoundest reverence and homage. This distinction is clearly marked in the way we address our Saviour in prayer, and the way we speak to Mary. We ask of him those things that only God can give ; mercy, grace, forgiveness ; we ask of her only that which we may ask of any fellow-Christian, that she should pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Our devotion to her—it is the summary of my whole argument—is the fruit of our deeper devotion to him ; she shines with the reflected glory of her Child. If Mary had not been chosen to be the Mother of God, she would have grown up like any other Jewish maiden, and we should honour her as we honour other Saints. But she *is* the Mother of God, and therefore we pay her an honour proportionate to her high dignity. For myself, I find it quite impossible to understand how anyone, looking at a statue or a picture of the Madonna and Child, can realise that the Child is God, and yet gaze with cold indifference at the face of the Mother who holds him. Let me end with the words of a wise and saintly teacher of a past generation (I am quoting from memory, and give only their substance) : ‘ If I be accused of wasting on the Mother of my Lord feelings and affections which he has jealously reserved to himself, I will appeal from the charge to his judgment, and lay the case before him at any stage of his earthly life. I will kneel before his cradle at Bethlehem, and acknowledge

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that, while I have worshipped him with the Shepherds, and with the Magi have presented to him oblations of gold and frankincense and myrrh, I have not scrupled to make a humbler offering of reverence to the Mother, who, in the winter frost of that unsheltered stable, went down to the Gates of the World to let him in. Or I will meet him as the Holy Family repose on their desert path to Egypt, and confess that, while I have sympathised with him in his early flight, I have not withheld my love from her whose fatigue and pain were increased a thousand-fold by his. Or I will seek him in the Holy House at Nazareth, and tell him that, in loving her, I have but tried to imitate his example, who came from Heaven to be my model, as of every other virtue, so of filial affection. Or, finally, I will approach a more awful tribunal, and, prostrate at the foot of his Cross, I will own to him that, while I have adored his wounds and wept at his sufferings, I have not restrained my compassion for her whom I saw resignedly standing by his side, clasping to her heart the piercing sword of agony, which transfixed his own. And to the judgment of Jesus I will gladly bow, and his meek mouth shall speak my sentence, and I will not fear it. For I have already heard it spoken from his Cross, to me, to you, to his whole Church, when he said, " Behold thy Mother ! " "

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CRUCIFIX

‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross
of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ GALATIANS VI. 14

I

IF you look in the Calendar of your Prayer Book, you will find that September 14th is Holy Cross Day. This festival was called Rood Mass by our forefathers ; it commemorates the erection by the Empress Helena of a great basilica, on the site of the Empty Tomb, to contain the relic of the Cross which she had discovered amid the ruins of the Holy City. This basilica was solemnly consecrated on September 13th, A.D. 335, and on the next day, being Sunday, the precious relic was exposed from a lofty place within the building. The custom was continued annually, and the festival has ever since been observed on this day, both in the East and in the West, as an occasion for glorying in the Cross.

When S. Paul tells us that he glories in the Cross, he is, of course, using symbolical language. A symbol is the representation, in some sign or picture or brief form of words, of a comprehensive principle

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or truth. In mathematics, for instance, the letters of the alphabet are used to represent definite values. In Freemasonry, the square and the compasses are a symbol of certain representative and governing ideas. The ring, again, is a symbol of the completed life which is brought about by the union of a man and a woman in marriage. So, too, in our Church worship, the Creeds, the ceremonies, the vestments, the candles on the altar, the incense, and so on, are all of them symbols, valuable not for what they are in themselves, but for the ideas which they represent and suggest to us. They differ from sacraments in that they do not actually convey grace to the soul, but they have a sacramental value, since, if rightly used, they help to produce in us the necessary dispositions for the appropriation of grace. In exactly the same way, S. Paul glories in the Cross because of what it suggests to him, because it sums up, in a picturesque and most touching symbol, the essence of the Christian Gospel.

Gaze, then, at a crucifix, and consider its symbolical meaning. It is a sermon carved in wood. It preaches to the eye, as the word spoken from the pulpit preaches to the ear. It is a powerful object-lesson in the meaning of the Christian religion. And, in particular, it proclaims to us three great central Christian truths.

First, it speaks to us of the wonderful love of God. It is not always easy to believe in the love of God ; at times it is so hard as to be all but impossible. We need no proof of God's power ; ' the heavens declare

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the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork.' We need no proof of God's wisdom ; it is conspicuously displayed in the miracle of life, in the constancy of nature, in the perfection of its ordered parts, in the petals of every wayside flower. But that God is Love—that, indeed, needs proof, while

Nature red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shrieks against the creed.

The watchword of nature, it has been said, is not peace, but war. Man fights with man and beast with beast ; bird fights with bird and fish with fish. The calmest summer evening to him who knows nature's story is only calm as the battlefield is calm where multitudes lie dead. Moreover, there are all the problems of human pain and sorrow and bereavement. Man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards ; pain dogs his steps from the cradle to the grave. Which of us has not cried in some moment of acute bodily pain or mental stress, or sorrow of heart, with all the bitter agony of soul-shaking doubt, ' Can God really love me, when he lets me suffer so much ? ' There is evidence enough in nature and in human experience to stagger the strongest faith in the love of God, except for one thing, the Cross of Christ. Listen to the Saviour's words : ' God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son.' Listen to the words of S. Paul : ' Scarcely for a righteous man would one die, but perchance for a good man some would even dare to die.

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But God commendeth (i.e. proves) his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.'

Yes, the death of Christ upon the Cross is the everlasting proof of the love of God. His death is different from that of any other martyr who has given his life for his fellows, because he himself is different from any of the sons of men. It is the Incarnation which gives its unique value to the Cross as a symbol or expression of the love of God. If Jesus was only the best man who ever lived, if the last that was seen of him was when he was put into the grave, then his death is only a proof of his own love for humanity, it is no proof of the love of God. In fact, it is, if anything, only one more indication that God does not love us, for then the dying Christ was only one more martyr left unhelped to die in darkness and in pain, and his faith in the Father to whom he commended his spirit was nothing but a bitter and a baseless delusion.

But if the Christian Gospel be really true; if Christ be the Very and Eternal Son of God; if in the Incarnation God divested himself of his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; if God was in Christ so completely, and in such fashion that the character of Christ is the character of God, his acts God's acts, his sacrifice God's sacrifice, his love God's love—if, in a word, God, in giving us Christ, gave us his *all* because he gave us himself; why, then, in the face of so wonderful a proof we can no longer

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doubt, in spite of all the difficulties in nature and experience, that God does really love us.

II

Then, secondly, the crucifix is the symbol of the divine forgiveness. It hangs over the pulpit in a Catholic church, to remind preacher and congregation alike that the Christian Gospel is a Gospel of Redemption from the guilt, the power, and the penalty of sin. Sin is something more than a theory; it is an awful fact whose sinister influence we all of us know in our own most bitter experience. We can never find complete happiness, we can never fulfil the true purpose of our being, until we gain deliverance from sin. And therefore it is that we glory in the Cross, for it proclaims to us the glad tidings of salvation. Christ is more than an example, he is a Saviour, who came into the world to save sinners, and who has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. To anyone who feels the guilt of sin, who is the slave of some evil habit, whose memory is burdened by the bitter consciousness of a guilty past, the Crucifix brings the comforting message of forgiveness. He who is nailed thereon is a Saviour from sorrow, but he does not take his Name of Saviour from that. 'His Name shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.' We can never find rest until we have found forgiveness, and such forgiveness Jesus has gained for us: yea! he has purchased it by the Blood of his Cross. There are mysteries in

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the Cross which we cannot hope to fathom. Many theories of the Atonement have from time to time been current in the Church, some of them unethical, some of them unintelligible, all of them to a greater or less degree unsatisfactory. But we are not saved by any theory of the Atonement, we are saved by the fact, and the fact that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself answers to the deepest and most fundamental need in universal human experience. It is the Cross, and the Cross alone, which throughout the ages of Christian history has brought peace and comfort to the hearts of sinners, and given them the power to conquer their sins and to rise to a higher and nobler life.

III

Once more, the crucifix is a symbol of the moral power of self-sacrifice. It teaches us that self-sacrifice is the most splendid thing in the world, and by far the most fruitful both for ourselves and for others. For beyond all question, the greatest thing in the life of Christ, that by which he achieved most for the world, is not his teaching, or his example, but his death. 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me; this he said, signifying what death he should die.' And, won by the irresistible attraction of his supreme generosity, the human race has gathered round his feet. The Cross, which was a symbol of shame, has become a symbol of triumph; the gibbet has been transformed into a Throne.

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How has it come about that that which was once an emblem of shame, the token of a degrading death, all and more than all that the gallows is to us, should now be the sacred and revered symbol which we place on our altars and above our sanctuaries? It is because it is the symbol of the supreme act of self-sacrifice, which proves God's love and guarantees his forgiveness. 'Christ humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, wherefore'—not in spite of, but because of, that abasement—'God hath highly exalted him, and given him a Name which is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

Self-sacrifice must ever be the dominant note in the religion of a Catholic. No great work is ever done in any department of life without it, and work for eternity which leaves its mark on souls must be inspired by the spirit of the Cross. The cry of the world is still, 'Come down from the Cross and we will believe in thee. Give us an easy religion without any pain or self-denial, and we will crowd your churches, and throng around your altars.' But the Voice of Jesus echoes across the gulf of ages, calling us from the struggle for wealth and pleasure to a life of self-conquest and self-discipline, bidding us take up our Cross and follow him. In the restraint of undisciplined desire, in the conquest of

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selfishness, in the faithful exercise of tenderness for the weakness of others, above all, in a stern adherence to principle, and a faithful loyalty to truth at whatever cost—it is in such ways that we are called to imitate the spirit of self-sacrifice which is symbolised by the Cross of Jesus.

IV

Let us, then, glory in the Cross as the symbol of all that is best and noblest in our religion. Let us love it, and reverence it, and gaze on it with grateful and penitent affection ; and let us ourselves use the sign of the Cross, not fearing the charge of formalism, for surely there need be no more formalism in the use of signs than in the use of words. To make the holy sign thoughtlessly, as a mere act of external ceremonialism, is, of course, useless—as useless as a thoughtless prayer—but it is not useless, it is a real help to piety, if it be made with reverence and care, as an outward and visible sign of an inward devotion to the Crucified, a witness before men that we are the loyal followers of Jesus, solemnly pledged by our Baptism to confess his Name before men. Tertullian, who lived towards the end of the second century, tells us how universal the practice was among Christians in his day : ‘ At every step and movement, whenever we come in or go out, when we dress and put on our shoes, at bath, at table, when lights are brought in, on lying or sitting down, whatever employment engages our attention, we

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sign ourselves with the sign of the Cross.' To use the holy sign so frequently would not, of course, be practicable or desirable to-day. But we can at least use it in our worship and in our prayers, as an aid to devotion, a reminder of the love, the forgiveness, and the self-sacrifice of God, a symbol of lofty duty and unfailing comfort, to kindle our aspirations, and wake in our hearts a more fervent love and loyalty to Jesus.

THE HOLY ANGELS

‘ Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.’

2 KINGS vi. 17

I

WHAT a contrast ! Calm confidence and abject despair stand side by side as Elisha and his servant gaze at the Syrian troop which encompasses Dothan. To the servant there seems no possibility of escape, no prospect but that of imminent capture and certain death. ‘ Alas ! Master,’ he cries, ‘ how shall we do ? ’ But his trembling accents awake no answering echo of terror from Elisha. The prophet’s courage is upheld by the vision of help which is vouchsafed to him. ‘ Fear not,’ he answers, ‘ for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.’ And at his prayer the eyes of his servant are opened, and he sees surrounding them and shielding them from the possibility of harm the serried ranks of the Holy Angels.

Lord, open their eyes that they may see. So the Church prays for her children, as on Michaelmas Day and during the month of October she bids us think specially about the Angels. In ancient times

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there was also a special commemoration of S. Michael on May 8th. In the Eastern Church his day is November 8th ; March 26th and July 13th being observed in honour of the Archangel Gabriel. But for many centuries September 29th has been kept as the Feast of S. Michael and All Angels in the Western Church, and the Guardian Angels have been commemorated on October 2nd. There is an obvious fitness in the arrangement which places what we may call the 'other-world festivals'—Michaelmas, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day—at the end of the Calendar. For the Liturgical Year is a drama of the journey of man from earth to Heaven. It opens in Advent with the Kyrie Eleison of a sinful world, and ends with the rejoicings of Angels and Archangels, and all the company of Heaven, at the finished work of the Incarnation.

Lord, open our eyes that we may see. There is great need that we should pray that prayer to-day, for there are so many people who regard the Church's teaching about the Angels as a mere picturesque adornment of religion, a luxury of the Christian imagination as it has been called, and who refuse to believe that they have any real objective existence. 'Angels !' they say. 'Yes, we believed in them once, just as we believed in fairies and elves and gnomes and Father Christmas, and all the other fascinating imaginations of childhood. Once we believed in Angels, as once we believed that the stars were the windows in Heaven through which

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they watched us. You do not seriously expect us to believe in them now. We are no longer in the nursery ; we have left its pretty fairy stories far behind us. The doctrine of Angels may be acceptable enough to people who are still in the kindergarten of their intellectual development, but to the modern scientific Christian it is nothing but a childish superstition.'

Such language is increasingly common at the present time, and it is therefore well for us to remember that all childhood's beliefs are not necessarily fables. They may be the result of that intuitive instinct which is more unerringly certain than reason. It may well be that our power of spiritual vision was stronger by far when we were children than it is to-day. Then we saw the flash of the silver armour of S. Michael, where now we discern nothing but the moonlight gleaming amid the shadows ; then it was some fairy gossamer that stirred the hedgerow, where now it is only the waving of a bluebell. It does not follow that now we are certainly right, and then we were certainly wrong. Perhaps we see not more, but less clearly than we did. Perhaps the glasses through which we look at the things of God have become blurred and indistinct by reason of the mists and vapours which rise up out of our sins. Perhaps our field of vision is obscured by the towering structure of materialism which dominates our modern life. 'Except ye become as little children,' says our Lord, 'ye cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' It may be, after all, that the

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children are right, that we are surrounded by an innumerable multitude of invisible intelligences, and that there is the sound of many voices on the other side of silence.

At any rate, let us assert defiantly, such a belief is not contrary to reason. If our environment is to be measured only by the things we can see, then we are poor indeed. The microscope has revealed to us vast worlds of teeming life, absolutely invisible to the naked eye, whose existence would have been vehemently denied by science not much more than a century ago. If this be true at one end of the scale of life, may it not be equally true at the other? If there are beings too small to be seen, may there not be beings too great to be seen? Moreover, belief in the existence of Angels is in complete harmony with the Law of Evolution, or, rather, with the anticipation of gradation of being arising from that law. Evolution teaches us that in nature there is an orderly and ascending scale of life, and we have no ground whatever for supposing that the kingdom of creation, which rises step by step from the lowest zœphyte to the highest human intelligence, can rise no higher. It is far more reasonable to suppose that the upward series continues, and that, to use the words of Canon Liddon, 'above man there are beings stretching, in rank beyond rank of ascending excellence, upwards towards the throne of the Uncreated and the Eternal.'

Again, belief in the Holy Angels is intensely scriptural. It does not belong only to those early

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parts of the Bible which may fairly be regarded as representing a crude and undeveloped religious belief. It is wrought into the very fibre of Holy Scripture, Old and New Testament alike. It is impossible to get rid of the Angels without tearing the heart out of the Bible. It begins almost on its first page with the Cherubim at the Gate of Eden, and ends with the Angel who tells S. John not to seal up the Revelation. Notice especially how intimately the Angels are associated with the life and teaching of our Lord. An Angel brings to our Lady the glad tidings of the Incarnation. On the night of the Nativity, the veil of Heaven is rent asunder, and the Angel Host is revealed for a moment as they sing their triumphant anthem of welcome to the new-born King. Angels minister to our Lord after the stress of the Temptation. An Angel strengthens him in his Agony. An Angel rolls back the stone at the door of the Sepulchre as the Saviour passes out to his risen and victorious life. To the disciples on Olivet a vision of Angels is vouchsafed, as they are gazing upward to catch a last glimpse of their Ascending Lord. And throughout his teaching the Saviour constantly refers to the Angels. He does not attempt to prove their existence ; rather, he takes it for granted as a matter of course. He speaks of them as rejoicing in the sinner's repentance. He tells us that they are our guardians and protectors. And he teaches us that when he comes again in power and great glory to judge the quick and the dead, the Holy Angels will

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be with him. It is difficult, indeed, to understand how anyone can be a Christian without believing in the Angels, for he is rejecting a truth which is indissolubly bound up with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

II

As Christians, then, we are bound to believe in the existence of the Angels. But that belief, if it is to be of any real value to us, must be something more than the barren acceptance of a doctrine. It ought to have, as it can have, a vital and practical bearing on character and conduct.

For instance, the realisation of the presence of the Angels may be to us, as to Elisha and his servant, a great encouragement. The Syrian army may well symbolise for us the forces arrayed against the Church of God ; and, sometimes, as we weigh the chances of battle, and estimate the strength of the enemy, we are tempted to despair. We seem to be in such a hopeless minority. Here are the forces of unbelief, fed with daily reinforcements. Here are the world, the flesh, and the devil, united in an unholy alliance, to crush and destroy us if they can. And if there seems reason to despair as we think of the enemy, our hearts sink within us as we examine our defences. Many of our troops seem weary of the battle ; others are armed with the blunderbusses of ancient arguments, which explode as soon as they are fired, and only injure the users ; some are

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quarrelling and bickering among themselves when they ought to be manning the walls ; some are calmly sleeping, having assured themselves that the defences are strong, and that there is no chance of a surprise ; some are traitors to the cause, busily engaged in pulling down the ramparts of the ancient creeds. Disheartened and despairing, we turn to our Lord and say, ' Alas ! Master, how shall we do ? ' Confident and calm there comes back the answer, ' Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.' And perchance for a moment he opens our eyes and we see. There in the midst is his own gracious Presence, and surrounding us on every side, are the armies of the Holy Angels. They bid us be strong and of good courage, for the cause of Christ is their cause as well as ours, and it must triumph in the end. Weak and helpless though we seem, yet we are stronger than the world, ' for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.'

Once, in the far-off past, the armies of Rome were doing battle against their enemies by the shores of Lake Regillus. And the tide of battle was against the Romans ; for all that brave men and devoted leaders could do, the enemy beat them back on every side. At last the Roman ranks were breaking. Men began to turn and fly. The day seemed lost. Higher and higher rose the opposing shouts of victory. When, of a sudden, in the thickest of the fray, two heroes in shining armour, mounted on milk-white horses, appeared fighting on the side of

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Rome. No man saw whence they came ; their faces were closed in helmets ; none knew who they were. But wherever they went victory went with them. The onset of the enemy recoiled in confusion ; at sight of them, the wounded caught their arms again, and hope rushed back to despairing hearts. And the flagging hosts of Rome felt a new courage breathed into them, as behind the great Twin Brethren they pressed on and onward ever, until the enemy broke and scattered, and a glorious victory crowned the Roman arms.

Whether there be any truth or not at the back of that old legend, I do not know. But when we are fainting in the battle, and tempted to despair of the cause of God and his Church, let us lift up our eyes to the Holy Angels who are fighting on our side, and take courage.

Again, belief in the Angels carries with it an assurance of guardianship in our personal lives. Our Saviour tells us that the Angels of little children always behold the Father's Face ; and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that they are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation. The Church interprets these words as teaching us that to every one of us a Guardian Angel is allotted at Baptism, who will never leave us nor forsake us unless we drive him away. Painters have loved to depict him spreading his wings over the pilgrim, and guarding his feet as he walks on the edge of precipices and pitfalls. Always our Guardian Angels are with us to protect

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us against the assaults of the evil spirits, who, as S. Augustine tells us, are subject to their power. Secure under their care, we may trust in the promise of the Psalmist : ' There shall no evil happen unto thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.'

If only our eyes were open, we might each one see our Guardian Angel, protecting us from the assaults of the devil, filling our minds with holy thoughts and good resolutions, driving far off the snares of the enemy. As we look back on our past lives, what room has there not been in them for the ministrations of the Angels ! That hair's-breadth escape ; that inexplicable premonition which saved us from disaster ; that timely assistance in the moment of our greatest need. We can, perhaps, remember some great crisis of temptation or difficulty when we could see no way out, and help came in some totally unexpected way. Had we but spiritual insight, we might have seen in the sudden interruption, the unexpected resource, behind the seemingly natural causes of our deliverance, the presence of our Guardian Angel sent to save us from the consequences of our own folly, sent to bar the way which led to our destruction, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Once more, the remembrance of the presence of the Angels may well act as a corrective to thoughtlessness and irreverence in worship. Day by day,

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as the great Sacrifice is offered in the quiet of the early morning, we join with Angels and Archangels and the whole company of Heaven in the Hymn of the Thrice-Holy, whose thunder rolls away from earth, to break in echoing reverberations on the shores of the Crystal Sea. That unspeakable Glory which is veiled from our eyes under the lowly forms of Bread and Wine, the Angels see face to face, and, seeing, worship with humble and reverent devotion.

Lord, open our eyes that we may see them ; that we may catch a glimpse of those veiled faces wrapt in deepest awe and reverence. So shall the spirit of holy fear be wakened in our hearts, as we understand something of the fervour and reality of that angelic worship, with which our Eucharistic worship is continually linked.

Blessed indeed is the Feast of Michaelmas, the Liturgical link between the life of earth and the life of Heaven. It reminds us that the Angels of God are ever ascending and descending on the ladder of our lives, encouraging us, guarding us, worshipping with us, as rung by rung we climb the steep ascent of Heaven.

All Saints' Day

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‘Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.’

HEBREWS xii. 1, 2

I

ON All Saints' Day, the Church opens for us, as it were, the door of Heaven, that we may catch a passing glimpse of the Church Triumphant assembled round the Throne of Christ. We see there the Queen of Saints, Mary Immaculate, once the closest sharer of her Son's sorrows, now the closest partaker of his joys. We see, too, the glorious company of the Apostles, and with them the missionary Saints who carried on their labours—Gregory and Augustine, the Apostles of England, Patrick of Ireland, Francis Xavier of the Indies, and the rest—each offering to God a great harvest of souls, from the fields which he watered with his labours and, perchance, hallowed with his blood. Here also is the goodly fellowship of the prophets, and the noble army of martyrs. Here, too, is the great array of unknown Saints. And what shall I

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say more ? for time would fail me to tell even of our English Saints whose names are known to us—Alban, and Chad, and Anselm, and Thomas, and the rest, who, through faith, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, out of weakness were made strong. Verily, it is a great multitude, which no man can number.

Let us think about the present state and activities of these, the great heroes of the Church, the Aristocracy of the Universe, that they may become more real to us, and that, inspired by their example, and aided by their prayers, we too may come to those unspeakable joys which God has prepared for them that unfeignedly love him.

II

The Catholic religion teaches us two simple truths about the present condition of the Blessed Saints of God. First, it teaches us that they are living an active, conscious, personal life. That, of course, is true of all the departed ; not only of the Saints in Glory, but of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, who are being cleansed, perfected, purified, and made ready for the life of Heaven. That the departed are alive is, no doubt, a truism to a Catholic. But it is one of those truisms which we are apt to take for granted, but very generally fail to realise and to act upon ; and, therefore, it is very important that it should constantly be pressed on our attention. To most of

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us death is still the King of Terrors. The unrelieved sorrow with which we surround it, the fear with which we shrink from it, give proof enough of our failure to realise in the realm of conduct the great Christian doctrine of the Resurrection. In the Memorials of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, we read his account of Browning's funeral. It was far too sombre to please him. 'I would have given something for a banner or two,' he says, 'and much would I have given if a chorister had come out of the triforium and rent the air with a trumpet.' The trumpet, with its defiant note of life triumphant over death, that is what Burne-Jones wanted to hear : and I think we urgently need to hear it too. It rings with clarion blast through the pages of the New Testament, but it is altogether absent from 'Memorial Services,' as they are called, and even, let me add, from our requiems and dirges. 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living ; for all live unto him.' That is the glorious message to all mourners of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we stand by his empty tomb, we know that death is only an episode in continuing life, a bend on the road that leads the pilgrim home. Let us lay firm hold of this great fact, that our dear ones who have departed this life are not in a state of coma or unconsciousness, waiting some trump which at some far-distant date is to summon them again to life. They are at this very moment vividly, consciously, personally alive.

And if this is true of all the departed, it is true in a most special sense of the Blessed Saints of God.

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‘I am come,’ said Christ, ‘that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly.’ They are not blind, deaf, unconscious, asleep. The reward of their faithfulness is not a condition of serene and undisturbed repose, in which they dream away a life of inglorious ease. Now that they have fought the good fight, and entered into the nearer Presence of God, they are not less, but far more alive than the people we speak of as living. Their life is fuller, larger, richer than ever it was on earth. They have passed from the region of the dead living, to take their place among the living dead. The blessed Saints are at this moment standing in the Presence of God, in the fullest possession of all their faculties, in the fullest exercise of their developed capacities, feeling in every fibre of their being that the life they live now is not less real, but more real; not less great, but more great; not less intense and full, but far more intense and full than the persecuted, tempted life they lived here on earth. That is the magnificent Gospel of the Resurrection. The Saints are ‘with Christ,’ glorying in the possession of perfect and abundant life.

III

That is the first thing our religion teaches about the present condition of the blessed Saints—they are vividly, consciously, personally alive. And, secondly, it teaches that they are in the closest fellowship with us. Now that they reign with Christ in

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glory, they are not forgetful of their brethren on earth ; they are not unmindful of our trials, or unconscious of our struggles, or powerless to aid us in our journey heavenward. To the modern as to the ancient pagan, love and life perish together in the grave. You may, perhaps, remember the pathetic lines in which Swinburne describes the end of a life-long friendship :

They loved their lives through, and then went whither ?
And were one to the end ; but what end who knows ?
Love deep as the sea, as a rose must wither,
As the rose-red seaweed that mocks the rose.
Shall the dead take thought for the dead that love them ?
What love was ever as deep as the grave ?
They are loveless now as the grass above them,
Or the wave.

The Feast of All Saints comes like a breath of Heaven, to sweep away the mists of this despairing paganism which still wraps such countless hearts in gloom. To-day we proclaim through the symbolism of our worship the great doctrine which day by day we repeat in our Creed : ' I believe in the Communion of Saints.' And by the Communion of Saints we mean that all the members of the Church, whether on earth, or in Purgatory, or in Heaven, have fellowship with one another, as being one Body in Christ Jesus.

Is this scriptural doctrine ? Yes, it is ; as scriptural as any doctrine can possibly be. How anyone can read the New Testament and fail to learn from its pages that the Saints in Glory are in touch with

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us, that they see us, and know about our needs, and watch and care and pray for us, I am at a loss to understand. Even Dives, in torment, thought and cared and prayed for his brethren on earth. Think, again, of that great scene in the Mount of Transfiguration, when the eyes of the wondering disciples were opened for a moment, and they saw Moses and Elijah, those two great heroes of the old dispensation, holding fellowship with Jesus, and talking with him about the great deliverance he was to accomplish by his death. Or turn to the great eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which has been finely called 'the Westminster Abbey of the Bible,' where the writer recounts the soul-stirring exploits of the great religious heroes of his race. And then read on into the twelfth chapter, where he reminds his readers that all these holy men of old were still near them, and about them, watching how they ran their race, sympathising with them, cheering them by their presence and their interest. 'Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.'

Pass on to the twenty-second verse of the same chapter. The writer is contrasting the Christian with the Jewish faith, especially from the point of view of worship, and this is what he says: 'Ye are come'—not ye will come at some future time when death is past, but ye *are* come, now, already—'unto

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Mount Sion, and unto the city of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of Angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are enrolled in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.' Yes, every time we gather at Holy Mass, the great act of Christian worship, we come into this blessed fellowship. There are more with us always than we can see, for Jesus is here, and his Angels are here, and the spirits of just men made perfect are here. They are with us, though we cannot hear them speak or see the glory shining on their faces.

Grant Duff, in his *Notes from a Diary*, tells the story of an old priest who was trudging home through the pelting rain after early Mass on All Saints' Day, when a parishioner stopped him to ask how many had been at the service. "Millions ! millions !" he replied. It was a true and adroit answer. For whenever the Holy Sacrifice is offered, the church is full, though the visible worshippers be but a handful. Oh ! if only we had *eyes*, we should see the Altar as it really is, a blaze of Heavenly glory, all sparkling and aglitter with the jewelled diadems of the redeemed. So often as our great Act of Worship is offered, Prophets, Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors assemble with the Church on earth, and join in its adoration, invisible to mortal sight but not unfelt. 'We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses.' 'We are come to the spirits of just men made perfect.'

Among the many errors of Protestantism, this

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has been by no means the least, that it has forgotten this great truth of the Communion of Saints, and has separated earth from Heaven. It has forbidden men to pray for their own departed loved ones, or to ask for the prayers of Blessed Mary and the Glorified Saints, and the human heart has taken its inevitable revenge for this practical denial of Christian fellowship by betaking itself to Spiritualism. The cultivation of the occult is beset with such grave perils to the mental, moral, and spiritual life that Christians cannot be too solemnly warned against it. But the true way to combat Spiritualism is not by mere denunciation, but by ourselves emphasising this great doctrine of the Communion of Saints, and by rescuing it from the neglect into which it has fallen. For though Spiritualism is so false and mischievous, yet its popularity is undoubtedly due to the wholly right and natural craving for fellowship with those who have passed into the other world, the desire to prove that the life here and the life beyond are not closed to one another, but open in all sorts of wondrous ways. 'We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses.' 'We are come to the spirits of just men made perfect.'

IV

What is the practical significance of this truth of the Communion of Saints? Much every way. There are a number of ways in which it can help us to live noble and Christ-like lives. To mention

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only one of them—it gives us encouragement and inspiration. That is the point of the All Saints' Collect, in which we pray to God, who has knit us with the Blessed Saints in one communion and fellowship in the mystical Body of Jesus Christ, to give us grace to follow their example, in all virtuous and godly living. And that is the point which the sacred writer makes in the passage we have been considering. 'Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us . . .' The picture suggested by the words is that of the Roman amphitheatre, with its thousands of spectators, sitting on crowded benches, tier above tier, to watch the conflict. But there is more in the figure than this, for the Greek word translated 'witnesses' is the same as our word 'martyrs.' The two applications of the word are combined in the writer's thought and expression. He bids us remember that those who are now spectators have themselves played their part in the arena. The actors of yesterday are watching the actors of to-day, and seeing how we play the parts they played so splendidly of old. The heroes of the faith whose conflicts are now over, and who are living in the heavenly world into which the Blood of Jesus has admitted them, are not separated from us in some shut-off and far-away Heaven, but watch us as we in our turn battle against the forces of evil, and, as they watch, they pray for us and strengthen us, and urge us on to more strenuous effort. Surely, there is something wonderfully inspiring in the

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thought that, as we play our little part upon the stage of life, we have as an audience the Aristocracy of the Universe ! How great is the encouragement contained in the thought of that august audience, the perpetual contemplation of those invisible beholders ! They remind us that we have great things to live up to. That is Tennyson's thought in *In Memoriam* :

Do we indeed desire the dead
Should still be with us, at our side ?
Is there no baseness we would hide ?
No inner vileness that we dread ?

What sort of performance are we giving in the theatre of our daily lives ? Is it worthy to be played before those great actors of the past, who watch us from the galleried spaces of eternity, and whose eyes are strained to behold the deeds with which we match their splendid records ? What of our prayers, our Communion, our battle with our besetting sin ? What of our witness for Christ at our work, and in our homes ? What of the part we are playing in the great religious drama we are staging to-day, the Anglo-Catholic campaign for the conversion of England ? Can we hear S. Augustine clapping ? Will the Saints of God call us again and again before the curtain ? Or must it fall in shame and silence, or amidst a storm of hisses from the great heroes of our Faith, to whom the truth was a reality and not a mere profession, and who must fain judge us utterly

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unworthy of our heroic ancestry, and of the historic succession of splendid and devoted service in which our lives are found ?

Let me end with a story. I take it from Mr. Frank Boreham's delightful book of essays, *The Other Side of the Hill*. An old county cricketer had lost his sight ; he was stone blind. And it was the grief of his later days that he could not see his own boy play the great game in which he himself had excelled. The son became the crack bat of the school team, and used to lead his father to the ground. But, beyond hearing with inexpressible delight the comments of the crowd on his boy's play, he got small satisfaction from it. One day he suddenly died. The following Saturday an important match was to be played, and the other members of the team took it for granted that their best bat would be absent. But, to their surprise, he strolled down to the pavilion in his flannels and announced his intention to play. And he batted that day as he had never batted before. He cut, and pulled, and drove with magnificent audacity and judgment. His companions were bewildered. He rattled up a century in no time, and won the match with ease. After the applause in the pavilion had died down, a friend said to him : " You played the game of your life this afternoon." And he replied : " How could I help it ? *It was the first time my father ever saw me bat.*"

'Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every

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weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.' The Aristocracy of the Universe form our audience. The multitudinous Saints of past generations are gazing at us to-day. With what breathless interest they watch us ! How their hearts go out to us, as we work and battle for Christ and our Holy Faith ! They pray for us, they stimulate us, they inspire us, with ringing cheers of encouragement they urge us on. Shall we not answer at their call ?

PURGATORY

‘If any man’s work be burned, he shall suffer loss ; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.’

I CORINTHIANS iii. 15

I

HOW mysterious and solemnising is the thought that we shall live for ever ! In the lapse of millions of ages, for aught we can tell, it may be the purpose of God that this material universe shall give place to some new form of creation ; that other planets shall circle other suns ; that in slow progression, or by some sudden catastrophe, the immense cycle of our present system of nature shall come full circle, and expire. But even then we shall be living still, with countless such periods of existence still opening out before us.

And this thought becomes even more mysterious and more solemnising when we consider that it is true not only of ourselves, but of all humanity. Everyone who has ever lived is still alive. Count the generations that have come and gone. Call back to memory the crowded populations of long-vanished empires. Add up in one gigantic sum the myriads that have laughed and wept and loved

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and hated and played and prayed since man first came to be. Their bodies lie together in the earth's wide grave; the green corn of spring bursts year by year from their commingled dust. But where are the imperishable spirits, the minds that thought and planned and fumed and fretted, that were swayed by anger or greed or ambition, or moved by gentler and holier motives? Somewhere within the confines of God's universe we know that they still keep vigil.

Canon Liddon used to tell a story of an Indian officer who had seen many years of service, and taken an active share in many of the memorable struggles of the Indian Mutiny. Towards the close of his life this old veteran was one day narrating to a group of his friends some of the exciting events of his past career. Led on by their interest and sympathy, he was induced to traverse long-past years, and as he related personal encounters, thrilling adventures, hairbreadth escapes, since interwoven into the terrible record of the Mutiny, their interest grew keener and more exacting. Finally the old man paused for a moment; then he said, 'I am looking forward to a far more exciting adventure than any I have related.' Being a man well over seventy, long retired from active service, his listeners failed to catch his meaning, and asked him to explain. He paused again, and then said in an undertone, 'I mean in the first five minutes after death.'

What happens after death? That is the most keenly debated of all religious questions to-day, and

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the Catholic Church answers it with a clear and consistent revelation as she leads us with a swift and dramatic transition from the Feast of All Saints to the Commemoration of All Souls. She teaches us that those who depart this life belong to one of three classes. There are some who have lived such holy and self-sacrificing lives that they pass at once to the joys of Heaven. There may be some—though we know this for certain of no single individual—who have given their souls so utterly to evil that they pass into that outer darkness which we call Hell. The remainder, the great majority, die not completely wedded to sin, but with characters imperfectly formed, and with many traces of sin remaining. These pass into a state called Purgatory, where they are purified, schooled, and disciplined, and made ready for the life of Heaven.

II

It will be well worth while considering in some detail how completely the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory harmonises with the teaching of Holy Scripture. To begin with, there are two foolish popular notions on the subject of the after-life which people who know their Bibles will naturally reject at once. The first is the idea that the dead are all sleeping till the Day of Judgment. It is true that the figure of sleep is commonly used in connection with death both in our Lord's teaching and throughout the New Testament. But a little thought will

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show that it is only a simile taken from the sleeping appearance of the body. No one can study our Lord's teaching about the life beyond without realising that it cannot be a state of unconsciousness. 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living ; for all live unto him.' The New Testament consistently represents the state of the departed as an active, conscious, vivid existence. And the same thing is true of the teaching of the great Fathers of the Church. ' Shall we sleep between Death and the Judgment ? ' asks Tertullian, ' why, souls do not sleep even when men are alive. It is the province of bodies to sleep.'

Then, secondly, there is the old-fashioned Protestant teaching, which still has a good deal of currency, that at death the great majority of men go at once to Heaven or to Hell, to come back at the Last Judgment to hear their final destiny. ' Those who hold such a belief ' do err, not knowing the Scriptures.' For the Scriptures have no such teaching. On the contrary, they teach quite clearly the doctrine of an Intermediate State. The Jews in our Lord's time believed in such a state, which they called Hades—i.e. the Unseen World. Their teaching, of course, has no authority for us, and doubtless many of their notions on the subject needed much correction. But our Lord gave his sanction to their belief in the main, and used their very phrase in speaking of the next life, when, in the story of Dives and Lazarus, he described the rich man as in Hades, lifting up his eyes in torment. So, too, following

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the teaching of S. Peter in his first Epistle, the whole Church repeats day by day in her Creed : ' He was dead and buried and descended into Hades.'

The teaching of the New Testament about Purgatory has been obscured in our day by the fact that most people read the authorised version of the Bible, where the word Hades has been translated Hell. But at the time the authorised version was translated, the old English word Hell had a very different meaning from that which we give it to-day. The tendency of words to change their meaning is a very fruitful cause of misunderstanding in religious discussions. Thus, to take a familiar instance, the word ' substance ' means one thing in the Nicene Creed, where we declare our belief that our Lord is ' of one substance with the Father,' and an entirely different thing in modern popular speech, where it means something that can be touched and measured and weighed. There would be much less prejudice against the Catholic doctrine of the Blessed Eucharist if this distinction were generally understood. So with the word Hell. In old days it simply meant the unseen or covered place, and there were no terrible associations connected with it. The Revised Version puts this matter right—e.g. ' His soul was not left in Hades.' ' I have the keys of death and of Hades.' ' In Hades the rich man lifted up his eyes, being in torment.'

With the removal of these two misconceptions, the way is clear for a consideration of the positive teaching of Holy Scripture as to the state of the

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Holy Souls. S. Paul indicates the doctrine of Purgatory (the word simply means a place of cleansing) plainly enough when he says : ' If any man's work be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.' He is speaking, it must be remembered, of those who die in a state of grace, who have built their character on the foundation of Jesus Christ, and he tells us that if any defects are found in that character they must be purged as though by fire. These words surely mean that the imperfections and sins of a Christian's life must in some way be removed before he can be admitted into Heaven ; and in this sense they have always been interpreted by the Fathers of the Church.

Again, the doctrine of Purgatory seems to be necessitated by the teaching of the Bible about the Justice of God. Holy Scripture tells us in many places that God will judge every man according to his works. Thus, for instance, our Lord tells us that for every idle word that we speak we shall be called to account. And he points out in the plainest way the distinction between the punishment due to rebellion and the punishment due to ignorance and carelessness : ' The servant which knew his Lord's will and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.'

How is it possible to reconcile such teaching with the notion that at death men go at once either to Heaven or to Hell, where they are punished or rewarded alike ? It seems impossible to believe in a

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just God who deals with every man according to his works unless we believe in the existence of a middle state between Heaven and Hell, where he who dies in the guilt of lesser sin may be purified and disciplined, and so be able at length to enter into the everlasting joys of Heaven.

Moreover, Holy Scripture teaches us that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and that nothing defiled shall enter Heaven. But which of us, even though we be not stained with the guilt of mortal sin, has not some lesser stain upon his soul, sufficient to render him unworthy to enter that most holy abode? The Church teaches us, indeed, as I have already pointed out, that there are some pure and holy souls who at their death have been found worthy of immediate admission into the company of the Blessed; our adorable Lady, whose spotless soul was never defiled with sin, the Martyrs, who by the generous sacrifice of their lives for Jesus have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb, and the great Confessors of the Faith and other illustrious Saints of God, who for their patient sufferings and heroic virtues have been granted the same transcendent privilege. But of how few Christians can it be said that at death they possess sufficient holiness to enter Heaven? Or think of the heathen, who through no fault of their own have never heard of Christ. No one now believes that they are all doomed for ever to the outer darkness. Yet to imagine that, without any purification or instruction in the things of God, they are to be

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admitted at once to Heaven is to obliterate all moral distinctions. Respect for the love and justice of God compels us to believe that death cannot finally and eternally settle destiny, but that, beyond it, God is still dealing with souls, and that purification and training are still possible.

It may seem strange, in view of the plain teaching of the Bible on the subject, that there is such a violent and long-standing prejudice against the doctrine of Purgatory on the part of those Christians who appeal from the teaching of the Catholic Church to Holy Scripture. The reason, however, is not far to seek. There is no doubt that in the later Middle Ages very serious corruptions had grown up in connection with the doctrine. It is these corruptions, and not the doctrine itself, which are condemned both by the Thirty-nine Articles and by the Roman Church in the Council of Trent. The sordid traffic in Masses and Indulgences made deeply religious people regard the whole idea of Purgatory with hatred and suspicion. But the abuse of a thing does not take away its use, and the doctrine of Purgatory remains, as it always has been, the teaching of the Universal Church of Christ, based on the evidence of the Bible, and necessitated by the Christian conception of the justice and the love of God.

III

How long do the Holy Souls remain in Purgatory? What is their occupation there? What is the

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nature of their purification and training? These are tremendously interesting questions, but they must remain unanswered, for neither the Bible nor the Church gives us any sure word of prophecy about them. We shall not know what Purgatory is like until we ourselves pass into that shadowed realm.

S. Paul, in the words I have already quoted, speaks of fire, and our Lord represents the Rich Man in the story as saying, 'I am tormented in this flame.' But this was a common expression used by the Jews at that time to illustrate the sufferings of purgation, and we must not take it literally. Apart from any other consideration, it is impossible to conceive how material fire could affect an immaterial spirit. At the same time, the symbol of fire is suitable and instructive because it suggests the twofold idea of pain and purification; pain, for in some way beyond our imagination the Holy Souls are suffering the inevitable consequences of their sins; and purification, in the slow and laborious process of discipline, whereby they are prepared for the glory of the Beatific Vision. But, side by side with suffering, there is joy in Purgatory, joy in the complete assurance of final happiness, joy in the absence of sin and temptation, joy in a clearer vision of God, and a more intimate fellowship with him than can be attained on earth. So the Holy Souls have beautifully been called 'the Favourites of Jesus.'

Favourites of Jesus, there they lie,
Letting the fire burn out their stains,
And worshipping God's purity.

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Spouses of Christ they are, for he
Was wedded to them by his Blood,
And Angels o'er their destiny
In wondering adoration brood.

More we do not know, and it is unprofitable to speculate. We shall be better occupied in considering what we can do to help the Holy Souls.

First, we can pray for them. This has always been the practice of Catholics, and must almost certainly have been the practice of our Lord himself, since he took part in the Temple services in which prayers for the departed were regularly offered. The Church dedicates the whole month of November to prayers for the Holy Souls, for the faithful in general, for deceased bishops and clergy, for parents, friends, and benefactors, and for those who have died during the past year. It is not meant, of course, that such prayers are to be confined to this month; the subject is brought specially before us at this time, that we may be reminded of the duty of praying diligently for the departed at all times.

We ought to pray for all the Holy Souls, but there are some who have special claims on our charity. Naturally we shall make particular mention of our own kinsfolk and benefactors. Then there may be those whom we have led astray by bad example. What a joy it would be to help them to pay the last farthing of their debt, and to open for them the portals of Paradise! We should pray, too, for those who are very far away from Heaven; for those who are particularly friendless, and who have no one else

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to pray for them ; for those who are being purified from the very faults to which we ourselves are most addicted, and for which we shall one day have to suffer.

Then, too, we can help the Holy Souls by good works, especially by alms-giving. We are permitted to do for them what they neglected to do for themselves on earth, and now cannot do. It is a particular duty, for instance, of those who have money left to them to devote a portion of the legacy to alms-giving on behalf of the soul of their benefactor. S. Augustine teaches us that we can aid the Holy Souls by our alms. And S. Chrysostom says : ‘ Oblations are not made in vain for the dead, nor are prayers said for them in vain, nor in vain are alms offered for them. All these things the Spirit has commanded, wishing us to be aided one by the other.’

Finally, and most important of all, we can plead the Holy Sacrifice for them. The Mass is the most efficacious way of aiding the Holy Souls, for it is an Offering for the dead as well as for the living. In every Mass we commemorate the Faithful Departed, but in a Requiem, as it is called—i.e. a Mass with black vestments and special prayers—the fruits of the Sacrifice are pleaded by the Church for their special intention. Those of us who have the opportunity should hear Mass with intention for the Holy Souls as often as we can, not only during November, but at other times as well ; and it is a very particular obligation of Christian charity to see to it that Mass

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is offered for our own kinsfolk, on the day of their funeral, and on each anniversary of their death.

We may rest well assured that such efforts will not be in vain in the Lord. 'For the dead are perfected leaning on our prayers, and reach upward to the Beatific Vision stayed upon our intercessions.'

ARMS AND THE WOMAN

‘ A good soldier of Jesus Christ.’

2 TIMOTHY ii. 3

I

ARMS and the Prince of Peace ! Warfare and the Kingdom of God ! Surely there is the grimmest kind of paradox in that association of ideas. Especially does it seem strange to us who have learnt through a terrible experience to hate war, and to regard it as the implacable enemy of human progress. ‘ Peace on earth ’ is one great note of the Gospel message, and it is through the steady spread of Christian principles that we look forward to the time when reality shall at last join hands with the poet’s ideal :

Down the dark ages, through long generations,
The sounds of war grow fainter, and then cease ;
And like a bell, with solemn, deep vibrations,
I hear the voice of Jesus Christ say, “ Peace ! ”

What possible analogy, it may be asked, can there be between the profession of a soldier and that of a disciple of Christ Jesus ? Yet, as a matter of fact, the New Testament is full of military metaphors ; and this is especially the case in the writings of S. Paul. In his missionary journeys, and above all in his imprisonments, he came much into contact with

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Roman soldiers, and this is probably the reason why he constantly describes Christian discipleship in the terms of military service. 'I have fought a good fight,' he says of himself. To the Ephesians he writes, 'Take unto you the whole armour of God.' To the Corinthians, 'Quit you like men, be strong.' To Timothy, 'Fight the good fight of faith,' and, again, 'Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.'

Thus, S. Paul thinks of the Christian as engaged in a warfare no less real than that of a soldier; no less real, although it is a spiritual combat, and waged against invisible adversaries. Some people make the great mistake of thinking that serving Christ is nothing but meekness and gentleness. That is not so; there is another side to the Christian life. We are not only the servants of the Prince of Peace; we are the sworn soldiers of the Lord of Hosts, enlisted at our Baptism to fight under his banner against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to continue his faithful soldiers unto our lives' end.

The question was once asked by a Nonconformist minister of a Catholic in a railway carriage: 'Sir, have you found peace?' 'No, sir,' was the unexpected reply, 'I find *war*.' A true answer, and a fine one. Christianity is an armed crusade.

II

On February 5th the Church lays a wreath of devoted remembrance on the tomb of a good soldier of Jesus Christ; no less a soldier though she was a

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young girl who never handled a sword. S. Agatha, Virgin and Martyr, has won an honoured place on the roll of the great Warriors of the Cross, and has been decorated by the King of Kings 'for Valour.' Three accounts of her life have come down to us, one in Latin, and two in Greek. We cannot depend on all the particulars they give us, for they date only from the fifth century, and the authors seem to have been more concerned to write an edifying narrative abounding in miracles than to transmit accurate historical traditions. But this much, at least, may be regarded as certain, that Agatha was a young Sicilian maiden, of great wealth and noble birth, who suffered martyrdom during the Decian persecution, in the middle of the third century. According to the traditional account, her hand was sought in marriage by the Roman Consul Quintilianus, who, on her refusal, availed himself of the edict of the Emperor Decius against the Christians to seize both her person and estates. Refusing to burn incense to Cæsar, she was thrown into prison and cruelly tortured; and then, persisting in her refusal, she was scourged and condemned to death. On her way to execution she prayed for courage and strength, saying: "O Jesus Christ, Lord of all, thou seest my heart, thou knowest my desire; do thou alone possess all that I am. I am thy sheep; make me worthy to overcome the evil one." Thus splendidly witnessing for her faith, she was burnt to death in the marketplace of Catania, on February 5th, in the year 251.

That, you may say, is a very meagre account; but

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it is a most significant fact that we have any account at all. S. Agatha's character and personality must have made a profound impression on her contemporaries for her name to be thus remembered. The fact of suffering death for Christ here in England to-day would make anyone famous, because it would be so exceptional. But it was very different in the third century. The Decian persecution, which broke out in the year 250, was the severest trial the Church had yet been called to endure, the first planned and deliberate attempt to exterminate Christianity altogether. Throughout the Roman Empire, even in the cities and villages of Egypt, the Christians were hunted down and destroyed. Many fled into the deserts and mountains. Some of them were never heard of again ; others were captured by the wild mountain tribes, and put to death or reduced to slavery. At Rome, the Bishop, Fabian, was executed at the very beginning of the persecution. The Bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem died in prison ; and Origen, the great Father of the Church, was treated with such severity during his imprisonment that he died shortly after his release. So terrible was the persecution that a very large number of Christians denied the Faith, some to escape imprisonment, and some under torture, while of those who remained faithful, thousands were put to death. Yet, of them all, only two have been singled out for commemoration by the Church : Fabian, the Bishop of Rome, the natural head and representative of the Christian community, and S. Agatha.

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III

The story of S. Agatha's sufferings has come down to us only in barest outline, but it is possible to fill in the details from contemporary accounts of similar martyrdoms. Here, for instance, is a description by an eye-witness of the death of the deacon Euplius, who suffered in the Diocletian persecution in the year 304.

Calvisianus the Consul said : " Let Euplius, who refused to give up the sacred writings, or to cease reading them to the people, be put to the torture." And while he was being racked, Euplius said : " I thank thee, O Christ ; guard thou me who for thee am suffering thus." Calvisianus said, " Cease, Euplius, from this folly. Adore the gods and thou shalt be set at liberty." Euplius said, " I adore Christ. Long have I desired what I now suffer. Do what thou wilt ; I am a Christian." After he had been tortured a long time, the executioners were bidden hold their hands. And Calvisianus said, " Unhappy man ; do but offer sacrifice to Mars and Apollo, and thou shalt be set free." Euplius replied : " Thy efforts are to no purpose ; I will sacrifice only to Christ my God." Calvisianus then gave orders that he should be tortured even more severely. And while he was being tortured, Euplius said : " Thanks to thee, O Christ ; help me, O Christ ; for thee do I suffer thus." And as his strength failed him, he went on repeating these or similar exclamations with his lips only ; his voice was gone.

Tortured, and then burnt alive ! Those who have seen S. *Joan* will remember how a master-hand depicts the dying agony of the Fair Maid of France. John de Stogumber, the English chaplain, who has been one of the foremost in hounding Joan to her

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death, comes rushing back into the Court after witnessing the Saint's martyrdom :

" I let them do it," he cries. " If I had known I would have torn her from their hands. You don't know ; you haven't seen ; it is so easy to talk when you don't know. You madden yourself with words ; you damn yourself because it feels grand to throw oil on the flaming hell of your own temper. But when it is brought home to you ; when you see the thing you have done ; when it is blinding your eyes, stifling your nostrils, tearing your heart ; then—then—O God, take away this sight from me ! O Christ, deliver me from this fire that is consuming me ! She cried to thee in the midst of it ; ' Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,' she said. She is in thy bosom, and I am in hell for evermore."

And a soldier says :

" I took this cross from the church for her that she might see it to the last. When the fire crept round us, and she saw that if I held the cross before her I should be burnt myself, she warned me to get down and save myself. When I had to snatch the cross from her sight, she looked up to Heaven. And I do not believe that the heavens were empty. I firmly believe that her Saviour appeared to her then in his tenderest glory. She called to him and died. This is not the end for her, but the beginning."

With such descriptions to help us, we have only to exercise a little imagination, and the picture of S. Agatha's martyrdom passes like a tragic yet splendid pageant across the theatre of our thoughts. We can see the young girl growing up in the faith and fear of Jesus in her stately Sicilian home, courted by the proud Roman Consul, fired by her youth and beauty

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and coveting her wealth. Follows the rejection of his suit, and then, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, the edict of persecution, coming with complete unexpectedness, after the Church had enjoyed peace for nearly fifty years. With dramatic swiftness, the tragedy moves on to its final scenes. The denunciation, the arrest, the trial before Quintilianus, now no longer a humble suitor, but a vindictive and relentless judge; the threats more and more terrifying in order to break down what seemed an unreasonable obstinacy; the torture-chamber, the glowing brazier, the red-hot pincers, the nameless mutilation, the white face of the martyr, marble in its pallor, yet aflame with the light of divine constancy; the repeated refusal to recant; and then the cruel scourging; followed by the great climax in the market-place—the feet and hands bound to the stake, the faggots piled around, the flames, the agony, the crown.

IV

Very few churches are dedicated to S. Agatha in England, and she is well-nigh forgotten among us. But all over the world Christians were proud of her once. She was indeed one of the most highly venerated martyrs of Christian antiquity. For ages a fierce dispute raged between Palermo and Catania as to which city could rightly claim the honour of being her birthplace. Her name is one of the very few inserted in the canon of the old English liturgy,

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and in that of Rome compiled in the fifth century. It is also in the most ancient calendars, both Eastern and Western. In early days many churches were dedicated in her honour ; in a letter of Gregory I, for instance, written about the year 460, we read of one such church in a suburb of Rome, which was famous for the mosaics with which it was decorated. Her name is, of course, specially venerated in Sicily, and in Catania, close by the spot where she suffered, a magnificent cathedral stands as the enduring monument of her heroism. The Church does well to keep her in honoured remembrance, for the message of her constancy comes ringing down to us across the chasm of the intervening centuries with a majesty and power unweakened by the passage of time. We stand greatly in need of the fixed, inflexible courage of S. Agatha to-day. For we live in an age when the claims of Christ are openly challenged, and in a country where the Catholic Faith is the religion of an unpopular minority. As a consequence, the duty of confessing Christ before men is very particularly imposed on us, and it needs high moral courage to be true to it. S. Agatha calls us to imitate her example by faithfully and loyally witnessing to Jesus. She reminds us that we all can witness if we will, and thus raise our lives from baseness to nobility, from the level of the commonplace to the sphere of the sublime. To the priest tempted to subordinate truth to popularity ; to the lad in the city warehouse invited to laugh at the impure jest and to join in the foul talk ; to the business man called to choose

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between principle and profit ; to the factory-girl, the typist, the waitress trying to live the Catholic life amid surroundings of constant temptation ; to each and all who are struggling on in the face of great difficulty and opposition to be faithful to Jesus Christ, and who nerve their souls to the constant sacrifices which Christian discipleship demands, there comes, as there came to S. Agatha, the sure promise of the Master, ' Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life.'

V

S. Agatha has received her crown. That frail young creature whose soul went up to God amid the cruel flames, and whose story after seventeen centuries is still an unfailing inspiration, is not resting in her tomb in Sicily, sleeping away the years till the Day of Judgment. She endured torture, not accepting deliverance, that she might obtain a better resurrection, and she has not been disappointed. She rejoices now among that blessed company who have come out of great tribulation, and who stand before the Throne of God and serve him day and night in his Temple. And from her place in glory she intercedes for us who are still struggling in the heat and dust of the conflict, exhorting us to be steadfast, and reminding us of the rewards of victory. O blessed S. Agatha, pray for us that we too may be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Pray for us that the same grace that strengthened thy pure soul may be

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poured into our wayward hearts ; that the same Everlasting Arms which supported thee amid the flames may hold us up as we pass through the scorching fires of temptation. Pray for us that some day, somewhere, in the many mansions of the blest, we shall meet thee, and that on our brows too shall rest, blazing with living jewels of righteousness, the diadem of an eternal reward.

Let me end with some lines entitled ‘The Song of the Christ Knight,’ which give very beautiful expression to the spirit of devoted Christian heroism, of which S. Agatha is such an illustrious example :

A helm upon my brow I wear,
I wield in my right hand a sword,
A banner with device I bear,
For Christ, my Lord.

Armed with the Spirit, helmed with hope,
My great Cross Standard wide unfurled,
I faint not, fear not, though I cope
With all the world.

I battle to my latest breath,
Then not my joys, but sorrows cease,
And I am borne to life, through death,
Through pain to peace.

The guerdon then ! O hour most sweet,
When I shall kneel for my reward,
Before the face, beside the feet,
Of Christ, my Lord.

Sunday Next Before Advent

BEHOLD ! THE DAYS COME

‘ Behold ! the days come.’

JEREMIAH xxiii. 5

I

LOOK forward ! Keep your eyes fixed on the future ! There is something better to come than ever has been ; a brighter day, a fuller revelation, a more wonderful redemption, a more glorious vision. That is the keynote of the Epistle for the Sunday next before Advent, in which Jeremiah prophesies the coming of Christ. Not only so, but it is the keynote of the whole of the Old Testament. From Genesis to Malachi we move in an atmosphere of expectancy. ‘ Behold ! the days come.’ So rings out the message from prophet and psalmist and historian and seer. The days when a Virgin shall conceive and bear a child ; the days when the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head ; the days when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings. No one can rightly understand the Old Testament unless he reads it in the light of the New, unless he uses it as a guide-book to Bethlehem, and Calvary, and Olivet. Those days to which the Old Testament

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looks forward have come already : Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Day, Ascension Day, Whitsunday. The Lord has raised up to David a righteous Branch, and this is the Name whereby he is called—the Lord our Righteousness.

‘ Behold ! the days come.’ It is the keynote of the New Testament, too. Christ is ever bidding his disciples look forward to his return in power and great glory, not to suffer, but to reign. As we read the Acts and the Epistles we see that the Apostles are filled with the same idea, that they constantly represent this present time, during which the heavens have received the glorified Christ, and men hear the invitation to repentance and remission of sins, as but a brief scene in the development of the great drama of redemption, a necessary state in the inauguration of those times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord when he shall come again. So the New Testament ends as the Old Testament begins, on a note of expectancy. ‘ He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus.’

‘ Behold ! the days come.’ The Church bids us make that the keynote of our thoughts, as, on the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year, she writes ‘ Finis ’ to her Calendar. Week by week she has led us on through the various incidents of our Lord’s earthly life. By the celebration of his Birth, Temptation, Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, by the commemoration of the Coming of the Holy Ghost, and of the Institution of the great

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sacrament of the Divine Condescension, by reminding us of the ministrations of the Holy Angels, and by bringing before us the examples of the Saints, the Church has taught us how to live and how to die, so that through the grave and gate of death we may pass to a joyful resurrection. As we look back on the past year, we remember the great things we have heard and the small things we have done ; we grieve to think how little we have progressed, if we have progressed at all ; we have, most of us, unhappy memories of opportunities wasted, misemployed, and lost. Well, the past is over and done with, and it is useless to regret it. ‘ Behold ! the days come.’ We must look forward and not back, resolving to begin again on Advent Sunday, and to use the new Church Year better than we have used the old. Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching out to those things that are before, we must press forward to the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

II

‘ Behold ! the days come.’ These words, in the context in which the prophet uses them, express a certain conviction of the providential guidance of history which is the basis of all true optimism. A Christian who lives up to his principles cannot help being an optimist, not because he shuts his eyes to the evils that are all around him, or because he looks at life through rose-coloured spectacles, but because he

BEHOLD! THE DAYS COME

believes in the providence of God. And, believing in a divine plan for humanity, he necessarily believes in a divine plan for his own life. Whatever troubles and difficulties may beset him for the moment, he looks forward to the future, in the sure confidence that they are transitory, that a brighter day is coming, and that 'all things work together for good to them that love God.' And yet! And yet! Is that our customary way of looking forward? When we say, 'Behold! the days come,' does our voice ring with the triumph note of eager expectation, as was the case with those Bible heroes of old? Is it not commonly true of us, on the contrary, that we make ourselves utterly miserable with our fears and forebodings? We become bankrupt in peace and joy through our wretched habit of borrowing trouble from the future. We are always spoiling to-day with the gloomy anticipation of evil that the future may possibly hold for us and for those we love, poverty, bereavement, sickness, failure, distress. With many people, indeed, anxiety about the future has been so long indulged that it has become a positive disease. They can never enter a car without a nerve-racking prevision of a fatal smash at a cross-road; they can never see their children go off to school in the morning without fearing that one of them will be brought home in an ambulance; they can never go out for an evening without anticipating that they will find the house burgled when they get home. No matter that experience has always hitherto proved their anxieties to be baseless; no

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matter that they have travelled thousands of miles on the road without even the smallest breakdown, and that the children come home in safety day after day, and that every time they have returned from the theatre or the pictures they have found the silver teapot still in its accustomed place ; they still go on worrying just as much as ever. People who wear out themselves and their friends with such needless anxieties are tacitly denying the love and care of God. God is our Father ; that is the fundamental truth in the Christian revelation. Yet belief in God's Fatherhood is meaningless if it does not include belief in his goodwill. That is what every child has a right to expect from his father. He may not understand all his father's purposes for him, but he is sure that they are always prompted by love. What I marvel at, both in myself and in others, is the way in which, in spite of our profession of belief in the Fatherhood of God, in spite of all our experience of it, in spite of the love that God has always showered on us, we should so constantly suspect him of wanting to do us harm. We say, ' Behold ! the days come,' not with a joyous and hopeful voice as if it were an inspiration, but with a gulp in the throat as if it were a curse. ' When we piece together the fragments of what is coming, as the child fits his blocks together to make a picture, we always turn the black side uppermost.' That is natural, we say. It may be natural, but it certainly is not supernatural ; it certainly is not Christian. What a blessed thing it would be for us if only we could be persuaded to

BEHOLD ! THE DAYS COME

unloose the heavy burden of our fears for the future, and leave them before the Altar of our Heavenly Father, whose every heart-beat is love, love infinite, eternal, unchangeable. We do not know the future, but we do know the God of the future, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; Jesus who has promised that he will be with us all the days, even unto the end of the world, and who has given us this great witness concerning himself : ‘ He that hath seen me hath seen the *Father*.’

III

‘ Yes,’ perhaps you say, ‘ that is all very well in its way. I admit that it is foolish to be anxious about possible troubles that may or may not come. But how can we say, “ Behold ! the days come,” with joyful expectation, when they hold two things at least from which everyone must naturally shrink ?’ I do not admit that the future holds anything from which a Christian must naturally shrink. But let us hear what these two things are.

‘ What about old age ?’ you answer. ‘ Surely everyone must shrink from that, and it is drawing uncomfortably close to me. I found a grey hair the other day, when I was looking in the glass, and I would have pulled it out, only they say if you do three grow in its place ; and I can see the crow’s-feet coming ; and I had my first twinge of rheumatism yesterday morning ; and when I ran to catch the bus, I wished I hadn’t. When I say, “ Behold ! the days come,” I think of the time now

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within measurable distance when I shall be too old to work. I can see the young people growing up and eager to step into my shoes. There are a dozen of them waiting for my situation ; they would take it, to begin with, at half the money. It is easy enough to talk glibly about the coming days. But who wants to grow old ? ’

No doubt, from the standpoint of the world, old age is a losing game, but for the Christian it has its great compensations. Think of the aged Christian folk of your acquaintance, and ask yourself whether they are unhappy. One of the most charming people I know is a very old lady, so spry and interested in life, so full of a chuckling humour, that it does me all the good in the world to have a talk with her. So wise she is, too, so rich in experience, so beautiful in her simple trust in God. Like a rare old vintage, she has mellowed with the years. I look at her, and I find no tragedy in an old age that has taken God for company. Says the author of a delightful essay called ‘ On Growing Old ’ : ‘ I find great comfort in believing that, as regards the best and noblest of all characteristics, the old man may be progressing to the last. You may like better to look upon the fresh green blades of June, but it is beyond question that, when the wheat is ready to be gathered, you see it at its best.’ So it is with the old folk who have ripened in Christ. They live in a divine world far more wonderful and beautiful than the world of their youth or early manhood. Like Bunyan’s pilgrims in the happy land

BEHOLD ! THE DAYS COME

of Beulah, their last resting-place before they came to the great river, ' they have more rejoicing than in parts more remote from the Kingdom to which they are bound ' ; and, with the conviction born of their own happy experience, they can say to us in the poet's words :

Grow old along with me !
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made.
Our times are in his hand
Who saith, " A whole I planned,"
Youth sees but half ; trust God ; see all, nor be afraid.

You need not tell me what the other gloomy apprehension is that shadows the coming days for you. I can guess it easily enough. It is that king of terrors, that skeleton at life's feast, Death. To the man who does not believe in the Christian religion death is a fearsome thing, for it promises nothing more than rayless darkness and eternal sleep ; or at best a journey into an undiscovered country where all is dim and shadowy and awfully uncertain. But the Christian can welcome death with the words : ' Behold ! the days come,' for his hope is full of immortality. The note of the New Testament is contempt of the fear of death. There is only one death that is fearful, the death which, please God, we shall not die : the death of the soul. But as for physical death, it is no such great matter after all.

Believing, as we do, that death is not so much

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an exit as an entrance ; believing that it is swallowed up in victory ; believing that it will bring us to ever-advancing heights of existence ; believing that Christ is waiting on its other side to welcome us ; believing that he has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel—how, then, can we fear to die ? Does the weary traveller fear to turn his footsteps home ? Is the tired child afraid to fall asleep on its mother's breast ? Death is just that to the Christian ; a going home to be with Christ ; a short sleep with an eternal and glorious awakening. If only we have real faith in Christ, if only we trust in his saving grace, and claim for ourselves his great salvation, we shall be able to say with eager expectation, as we think of death, ' Behold ! the days come.' We shall speak of it, no longer with terror and apprehension, but in words like those of Bunyan, all odorous with the fragrance of heart's ease and immortelle : ' The pilgrim they laid in a chamber whose windows opened towards the sunrising. The name of that chamber was Peace, where he slept till the break of day.'

THE END

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Festival and Fast

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